



University of Zagreb

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION  
SCIENCES

VEDRANA ŠENJUG UŽAREVIĆ

**TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO  
SECONDARY SCHOOL - LIVED  
EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE  
WITH DISABILITIES**

DOCTORAL THESIS

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Supervisors:

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Sveučilište u Zagrebu

EDUKACIJSKO – REHABILITACISKI FAKULTET

VEDRANA ŠENJUG UŽAREVIĆ

**PRIJELAZNI PERIOD IZ OSNOVNE U SREDNJU  
ŠKOLU- ISKUSTVO ADOLESCENATA S  
TEŠKOĆAMA**

DOKTORSKI RAD

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## SUMMARY

Transition is a concept that implies change and movement (Patton and Kyung Kim, 2016). In relation to education, transition can be defined as moving from one position, stage, school or environment to another (Riches, 1996). Life is full of transitions: starting school, entering puberty, leaving school, getting a first job, leaving home, retiring, and so on. Many transitions are related to family life - such as marriages, births, remarriages and deaths (Hutchinson, 2008). For students who are in school, change and movement occur throughout their school careers. Making far-reaching life decisions and passing through transitions to new roles explain why the transition to young adulthood has been put forward as the most stressful life stage (Dornbusch, 2000).

The objective of this study is related to adolescents with disabilities and their personal experience in specific social context, during the period when they transition from one way of life to another. This research aimed to understand the meaning that a group of young people with disabilities in the transitional period, from primary to secondary school, gave to their life in a social welfare institution and how they envisioned future in everyday life.

The focus was on interpreting the meaning of their everyday experience. To gain a deeper understanding of how adolescents with disabilities see their lives and what meaning they attach to certain events within a specific situation, the transition from primary to secondary school, a qualitative methodology was used: a semi-structured interview with adolescents with disabilities and a focus group of professionals.

The research involved 19 adolescents with different types of disabilities (intellectual disabilities, emotional problems, and behavioural issues) who attend a special institution and receive primary education according to a special curriculum for children with disabilities. These adolescents are in day/week or permanent residential care, living in a student dormitory.

The focus group consisted of 9 professionals who worked with adolescents with disabilities on a daily basis (the previously mentioned primary group of participants). The focus group recorded the views and opinions of the professionals on the kind of support they provide to adolescents with disabilities during the transition period.

Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The analysis of this research indicates that adolescents with disabilities receive support in the transitional period, but that it is still not sufficient. Although professionals are involved in the preparation of the transition period, the adolescents themselves express different attitudes and

feelings towards the transition to secondary school. The period itself is characterized by still a lot of unanswered questions and unknowns about the future life for adolescents with disabilities.

This research provides an opportunity for the voice of adolescents with disabilities to be heard, allowing them to become active participants in the decision-making process. The recommendations that may be useful in defining transition policies and developing and implementing new evidence-based strategies and measures include: (1) carefully planning the transition period, (2) enabling a participatory active role for adolescents with disabilities, and (3) ensuring appropriate support through informing and preparing adolescents to know what to expect from future steps in their lives.

Furthermore, this research makes a significant contribution to: (1) understanding the transitional period of young people with disabilities in Croatia and (2) contributes to the empowerment of people with disabilities in realizing their needs and rights by promoting the importance of the user's perspective and the contribution of their life experience, and (3) may represent an encouraging model for further similar and important research on the transitional period of adolescents with disabilities.

Keywords: transition period, adolescents with disabilities, qualitative methodology

## SUMMARY IN CROATIAN

Tranzicija je koncept koji podrazumijeva promjenu i kretanje (Patton i Kyung Kim, 2016). U odnosu na obrazovanje, tranzicija se može definirati kao prelazak s jedne pozicije, faze, škole ili sredine na drugu (Riches, 1996). Život je pun prijelaza: polazak u školu, ulazak u pubertet, napuštanje škole, pronalaženje prvog posla, odlazak od kuće, odlazak u mirovinu i tako dalje. Mnogi prijelazi povezani su s obiteljskim životom – poput brakova, rođenja, ponovnih brakova i smrti (Hutchinson, 2008). Za učenike koji su u školi, promjene i kretanja događaju se tijekom njihove školske karijere. Donošenje dalekosežnih životnih odluka i prolazak kroz prijelaze u nove uloge objašnjavaju zašto je prijelaz u mladu odraslu dob istaknut kao najstresnija životna faza (Dornbusch, 2000).

Cilj ovog istraživanja odnosi se na adolescente s teškoćama u razvoju i njihovo osobno iskustvo u određenom društvenom kontekstu, razdoblju u kojem prelaze iz jednog načina života u drugi. Ovim istraživanjem željelo se razumjeti značenje koje je skupina mladih s invaliditetom u prijelaznom razdoblju, iz osnovne u srednju školu, davala svom životu u ustanovi socijalne skrbi te kako su vidjeli svoju budućnost u svakodnevnom životu. Fokus je bio na tumačenju značenja njihovog svakodnevnog iskustva. za detaljnije razumijevanje kako adolescenti s teškoćama u razvoju vide svoj život i kakvo značenje pridaju pojedinim događajima unutar konkretne situacije, prijelaz iz primarnog u srednje škole. Korištena je kvalitativna metodologija: polustrukturirani intervju s adolescentima s teškoćama i fokus grupa stručnih djelatnika.

U istraživanju su sudjelovale dvije skupine sudionika: adolescenti s teškoćama u razvoju smješteni u posebnoj ustanovi Ministarstva rada, mirovinskoga sustava, obitelji i socijalne politike i stručni djelatnici iz te ustanove.

Sudjelovalo je 19 adolescenata s različitim vrstama teškoća (intelektualne teškoće, emocionalni problemi i problemi u ponašanju) pohađaju posebnu ustanovu, a osnovno obrazovanje po posebnom nastavnom planu i programu za djecu s teškoćama u razvoju koja su na dnevnom/tjednom ili stalnom smještaju, borave u učeničkom domu..

Fokus grupu čine 9 stručnih djelatnika koji su svakodnevno radili s adolescentima s teškoćama (ranije spomenuta primarna skupina sudionika). Fokus grupa bilježila je stavove i mišljenja stručnih djelatnika o tome kakvu podršku pružaju adolescentima s teškoćama u razvoju u razdoblju tranzicije.

Za analizu podataka korištena je induktivna tematska analiza (Braun i Clarke, 2006).

Nalazi istraživanja ukazuju da adolescenti s teškoćama u razvoju dobivaju nedostatnu podršku u prijelaznom razdoblju. Stručni djelatnici su uključeni u pripremu perioda prijelaza, a adolescenti iskazuju različite stavove i osjećaje prema prijelazu u srednju školu te ga karakteriziraju kao period u kojem imaju neodgovorena pitanja i nepoznanica o budućem životu.

Ovo istraživanje daje priliku da se glas adolescenata s teškoćama u razvoju čuje kako bi bili u prilici postati aktivni sudionici u procesu donošenja odluka. Preporuke koje mogu biti korisne u definiranju tranzicijske politike te izradu i provedbu novih strategija i mjera utemeljene na dokazima uključuju: (1) pažljivo planirati prijelazno razdoblje, (2) omogućiti participativnu aktivnu ulogu adolescenata s teškoćama u razvoju (3) osigurati odgovarajuću podršku kroz informiranje i pripremu adolescenata da znaju što mogu očekivati od budućih koraka u svom životu.

Također, ovo istraživanje daje značajan doprinos za: (1) razumijevanje tranzicijskom razdoblju mladih s invaliditetom u Hrvatskoj i (2) pridonosi osnaživanju osoba s invaliditetom u ostvarivanju njihovih potreba i prava promicanjem važnosti korisnikove perspektive i doprinosom njihovog životnog iskustva te (3) može predstavljati ohrabrujući model za daljnja slična i bitna istraživanja o prijelaznom razdoblju adolescenata s teškoćama u razvoju.

Ključne riječi: prijelazno razdoblje, adolescenti s teškoćama u razvoju, kvalitativna metodologija

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Children can be considered experts in their own lives and have many important things to tell about their everyday lives in education” (Lundqvist, 2016:4).

Throughout my career, in daily conversations with students with disabilities, I gained valuable insight into their problems and concerns. Students with disabilities placed in social welfare institutions, separated from their families, and educated according to a special curriculum, had many questions about the possibilities of making their own decisions regarding future education and life in general. This prompted the research at hand which involves asking adolescents with disabilities, especially those in the period of transition from primary to secondary school in an institution of social welfare, to express their experience with certain aspects of their life, the support they received, the fear of the unknown, and the readiness to face new situations in their lives.

Data from the Croatian Register of Persons with Disabilities shows that children with disabilities constitute 11% of cases among recorded decisions on the appropriate form of education for children under the age of 19 (Benjak, 2023). According to the Social Welfare Act (Official Gazette, No. 18/2022, 46/2022, 119/2022, 71/2023 and 156/2023), a person with disability is a person who has long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which can prevent their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with persons without disabilities (Article 4, point 9). Furthermore, a child with disability is a child who needs additional support in learning and development due to physical, sensory, communication or intellectual disabilities, in order to achieve the best possible developmental outcome and social inclusion (Article 4, point 10). Available data from the social welfare system indicate that 1.2% of persons with disabilities are residing in an institution of social welfare. The findings that 1.2% of persons with disabilities are residing in an institution of social welfare lead to significant problems in the practical implementation of education of students with disabilities as well as the issue of understanding disability within different systems. These are discussed in the thesis.

The developmental stage of adolescence has been defined as an ongoing crucial period of cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional transformations (Hines, 2007). It consists of self-definition, the biological and physiological development of a well-differentiated, integrated, and realistic identity; and interpersonal relatedness, the emotional and psychosocial development of mutually satisfying personal relationships (Hines, 2007).

Educational transition is a dynamic and ongoing process of adaptation as a result of moving from one educational context and set of interpersonal relationships to another (Mays et al., 2020). Students' developmental period during the process must be taken into account. A period of the primary-secondary school transition has been described as the crucial attribute of moving from the protected life of a child to the autonomous and independent life of an adult with individuals likely to vary substantially in the rate at which they attain this status (Hudson, 2003).

One of the important characteristics of the primary-secondary school transition is that it coincides with the developmental transition from childhood into early adolescence and often involves moving from a simpler school environment into a more complex one (Symonds & Galton, 2014). This transition from primary to secondary school is sometimes difficult for children. It is viewed as a crucial and significant period in much of the existing literature and has received more focus than any other period of educational transition (Jindal-Snape et al, 2019). For young persons with disabilities, challenges experienced during transition are likely to be more complex (Jindal-Snape et al, 2006) than for their peers.

A part of the process ensuring the best outcomes for students with disabilities is to support the students through periods of school transition (adapted from Ravenscroft et al, 2017). The specifics of the primary to secondary school transition period for adolescents with disabilities in institutions is the main topic discussed in the following chapters of the thesis. The entire process of transition to life outside the institution where they lived for several years and were educated as well as their future life is to be carried out in only a few steps in a short period of time. Concurrently, changes taking place in every aspect of their lives are important.

Disability is not an inherent and fixed feature of a person but the product of social, legal, political, and economic context (Rioux and Bach, 1994:9). It is a socially constructed phenomenon that changes over time and the form it takes depends upon the political system and other positionalities (Zaviršek, 2007: 21). Social action towards persons with disabilities is determined by the understanding of the concept of disability (Makvić Salaj, 2020: 22). Different approaches have affected persons with disabilities' quality of life where disability dominated their personal and social identities (Mihanović, 2019: 16).

The experience of disability is individual and depends on the social images and citizenship rights held by persons with disabilities (adapted from Zaviršek, 2007:21). In order to better understand how disability models were formed over time, how they contributed to the concept of persons with disabilities and shaped their lives in the Croatian context, the medical model, the social model and the human rights model are presented in more detail in this thesis.

Following the disability models, the importance of recognizing persons with disabilities' human rights in terms of education are discussed. Children are born with fundamental freedoms and rights that belong to all human beings. However, their physical and psychological immaturity provides them with special rights and protection (UN, 1989). An approach based on human rights and social justice introduces the use of various categories of rights and recognizes them as an important element in considering access to education (Rioux, 2013 in Igrić, 2015: 58). It has to be acknowledged that "education is in itself a human right, as well as a much-needed means of exercising other human rights" which enables children and young persons to gain a sense of self-worth and respect for others (Igrić, 2015: 62).

The Republic of Croatia is a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and one of the first countries that signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention in 2007. The education system in Croatia affords all children, learners and young persons—including those with disabilities, members of national minorities, gifted learners as well as those in a disadvantaged position, inclusion at all levels, including adult education and lifelong learning programmes (Eurydice, 2018).

As a signatory to all key conventions and standards in the field of social and economic security of its citizens, Croatia has committed itself to protecting and promoting the human rights of persons with disabilities to ensure their equal participation in civil, social, and cultural spheres (National Strategy for Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, 2017–2020, 2017:2; henceforth referred to as the "Strategy"). Policies aimed at further development of persons with disabilities' rights by removing everyday obstacles in their lives are continuously created at the national level adhering to modern international standards. As the most important national document, the Strategy strongly promotes and ensures complete and equal enjoyment of all human rights and freedoms to all persons with disabilities including children. Adhering to the human rights of children with disabilities and their need for support in the education system encompasses respecting their developmental capacities and their right to maintain their identities.

The goal of inclusive education is the full social inclusion of students with disabilities (Popović and Buljevac, 2016: 465). Inclusion in the education system gives each individual the opportunity to make decisions about their own lives and take responsibility for these decisions. It aims to enable students with disabilities to participate in everyday life in the most natural conditions possible according to their age (Eurydice, 2018). Unfortunately, problems still exist in the practical application of the legislative framework. The education of children with

disabilities is an integral part of the Croatian education system guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia.

Inclusion of persons/children with disabilities into Croatian society has not yet been fully implemented despite a declaratory commitment to inclusive education. One of the practical problems of the national system is the misunderstanding of the concept of disability which is further aggravated by the fact that persons with disabilities' rights in Croatia are realized in different systems which recognize persons with disabilities differently. Although the legislative framework foresees forms of support for students with disabilities, the possibilities of educational programs and the support of teaching assistants and communication mediators, certain procedures are not fully adequate with regard to the individual needs of students with disabilities, which is why some children with developmental disabilities still have to attend special schools.

Some children with disabilities are taken away from their families and placed in social welfare institutions as a result of poor socioeconomic conditions and/or family dynamics, where they are accommodated and educated according to a special curriculum.

The life experience of students with disabilities who are recognized in the education system as those who must be educated according to a special curriculum in a welfare institution is what prompted this research.

In the following chapters, the national context of educational opportunities for students with disabilities in Croatian schools as related to social policy and the right to inclusive education, in a regular school and a familiar and supportive social environment is presented in broader terms. A separate chapter describes the transition period seen as a process with special emphasis on specifics of transition from primary to secondary school. Theoretical frameworks were used to compare the results obtained through the research methodology. Furthermore, the findings of the research aimed at students with disabilities in the transition period as well as the theoretical frameworks through which the transition can be observed are presented.

## 2. THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The chapter presents the changing of the historical context and the development of international rights conventions intended to guide the states' policies and public authorities' perception of persons with disabilities as well as their practices. Adherence to the fundamental principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) reflects on the social perception of persons with disabilities.

National and international initiatives such as the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2003) have incorporated the human rights of persons with disabilities culminating in the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006<sup>1</sup>. The adoption of the UN CRPD (2006) represents a global paradigm shift reflected in not viewing persons with disabilities as objects of charity, medical treatment and social protection but as subjects with rights who can claim them and make decisions for their lives based on free and informed consent (Brown, 2016; Gradwohl, 2017).

The ultimate objective of the CRPD is full social inclusion of persons with disabilities in their communities which in turn support the person to live independently. The Convention is seen as the most recent and the most extensive recognition of the human rights of persons with disabilities and outlines their civil, cultural, political, social, and economic rights. Its purpose is to “promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity” (UN, 2006, Article 1, p.4).

Prior to the adoption of the Convention, the existing documents on human rights did not comprehensively deal with the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities (Mihanović, 2019:5). The CRPD signatories apply human rights to disability making general human rights specific to persons with disabilities and clarifying existing international law regarding disability. Even if a state does not ratify the CRPD, it helps interpret other human rights conventions to which the state is a party (Magret, 2008).

The ultimate goal of the Convention is to enable all persons with disability to enjoy the choices and opportunities currently available to only a minority by minimizing the adverse impacts of impairment and eliminating discrimination and prejudice (WHO & World Bank, 2011). Article 3 of the Convention (UN, 2006) outlines the general principles that indicates the

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<sup>1</sup> Further in text CRPD

necessity of respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, an independence of persons, non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity, equality of opportunity, accessibility, equality between men and women and respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities (UN, 2006, p. 5).

It is accompanied by an Optional Protocol that, if ratified, provides for complaints procedure and inquiry procedure which can be lodged with the committee monitoring the treaty. The Convention advances legislative reform directly involving people with disabilities and using a human rights framework. It is an instrument for providing benchmarks informing discussions about inclusive government policies and laws at sub-national level (Rioux et al., 2011). States must consult people with disabilities and their representative organizations when developing laws, policies, and programmes to implement the Convention. It also requires public and private stakeholders to make “reasonable accommodations” for persons with disabilities.

The core message of the Convention is that persons with disabilities should not be considered “objects” to be managed but “subjects” deserving of equal respect and enjoyment of human rights (WHO & World Bank, 2011). Persons with disabilities are entitled to all human rights and the importance of a human rights approach to disability is highlighted at the international level (Rioux et al., 2011).

The Preamble to the Convention acknowledges disability as an evolving concept resulting from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (UN, 2006:1, Preamble, section e). Defining disability as an interaction means that disability is not only a characteristic of the person.

Progress in improving social participation can be achieved by addressing the barriers hindering persons with disabilities’ day-to-day lives (WHO & World Bank, 2011). Communities have the responsibility to ensure people with disabilities enjoy the same rights and have equal opportunities as other citizens. Each person has the right to dignity obtained by birth regardless of their physical and psychological characteristics.

Equal opportunities are characterized by four values: dignity, autonomy, equality and solidarity (Žiljak, 2005). Taking this into account, “persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with



various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UN CRPD, 2006: 4).

Persons with disabilities are diverse and not defined by their disability (WHO & World bank, 2011:7). The modern understanding of the term disability emphasizes the responsibility of society for the emergence of disability in terms of the inability of a person and their family to be actively involved in their community and receive the necessary support society should provide (Lisak, 2013: 12).

Children with disabilities are first and foremost children. Everyday situations show their difficulties often lead to double discrimination. Children are often discriminated against members of society because they do not have access to information, physical force or suffrage (Opačak, 2006). Significant progress was made at the 44th session of the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989 by the unanimous adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (WHO & World Bank, 2011)<sup>2</sup>. It stipulates that all children have fundamental, indivisible, interdependent and equally important rights obtained by birth without any restrictions and encompassing all aspects of their lives (Opačak, 2006).

Disability rights are complex because there are multiple ways in which a person with disability can have their rights violated in different socio-political, cultural, and legal contexts. The CRC (UN, 1989) is the first document to approach a child as a subject with rights as opposed to just a person in need of special protection. It is a legal document that has the force of law and obliges parties to comply with its provisions. In addition, it reserves the right to monitor States that accepted and ratified it (Igrić, 2015:27).

The changes outlined above have led to the creation of a different image and perception of persons and children with disabilities as well as an increased respect for their human rights allowing them to participate in everyday life as full-fledged members of society who can have and must have opportunities to make decisions about all matters that affect them. Children are not just social actors whose wishes can be taken into account in decision-making but social factors directly involved in decision-making whose ideas can lead to change (Tomić, 2015).

The rights of children were viewed through two images of the child. One is the image of the child as a vulnerable being in need of protection and the other is the image of the child as a rights holder. The notion of the child as a vulnerable being is the foundation of protective rights and the notion of the child as an autonomous being is the foundation of participatory rights (Reynaert et al., 2012 in Tomić, 2015). Every child with a disability is entitled to special

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<sup>2</sup> Further on in text CRC

care, education/training and enhancing their abilities. This should enable each child with disabilities with the highest possible degree of independence and social inclusion. They have the right to state their opinions which must be seriously taken into consideration (CRC, UN, 1989).

State parties are moving in the direction of the human rights perspective on disability as evidenced by research showing adoption of non-discrimination or equal opportunity legislation in the context of disability (Quinn and Degener, 2002b:2). It can be concluded that the acceptance of international documents solved the main issues of understanding and accepting persons with disabilities, however, issues involving children with disabilities must not be forgotten. Children have the right to life and development in all aspects of life, including physical, emotional, psychosocial, cognitive, social and cultural.

Making decisions or enforcing proceedings affecting a child or children as a group must be in their best interest in all situations. This includes decisions made by governments, administrative legislation, and the family. Children must be allowed to actively participate in resolving any issues that affect their lives and must be allowed freedom of expression. These rights are essential for the overall development of the child into a psychologically healthy person. Particular emphasis is placed on children with disabilities and their active participation in the community. Participation is seen as a basic human right. As a result, children are not passive and vulnerable beings but active participants in the construction of their own lives, childhood and society as a whole (Tomić, 2015).

The next section presents the historical context in which disabled people, children with disabilities in particular, have lived as well as the process of changing the historical context into a new social perception of persons with disabilities with the intention of guiding state policies and public authorities towards it.

## 2.1. The meaning of the term disability, and disability models

This section presents the following historical and contemporary approaches to disability: the medical model, the social model and most recently the model of human rights which have conceptually shaped persons with disabilities and their families' lives and influenced numerous milestones in their position in society. In addition, they impacted the formation of the concept of disability in Croatia.

Disability is complex, dynamic, multidimensional, and contested (WHO & World Bank, 2011) and a part of the human condition. Everyone is likely to experience it at some point in their life either temporarily or permanently (WHO & World Bank, 2011:3). Disability may be visible or invisible and its onset can be at birth, during childhood, working age or old age. The way disability is perceived, diagnosed and treated in science and society is reflected in the assumptions about social responsibility towards persons with disability as a group (Krampač-Grljušić, 2015).

Some disciplines continue to treat disability as a disease or personal deficiency while others have adopted an understanding of disability as a social and political condition. Consequently, policies, programs, treatments, and care reflect attempts to fit these attitudes into an understanding of disability (Rioux, 1997). Historically, communities related differently to persons with disability depending on the degree of their economic and cultural development and other circumstances, ranging from inhuman behaviour and stigmatisation, ignorance and passive attitudes to integration, equal opportunities and inclusion (Bakula-Anđelić, 2005).

Stigmatisation of persons with disabilities, has been particularly pervasive. It includes the lack of understanding of the entirety of personality (character, identity, interests, desires, needs and rights, and quality of life) as it focuses only on the impairment. Stigmatisation is an overarching term referring to problems of understanding (ignorance), attitude (prejudice), and behaviour (discrimination) towards minority groups which forms a subtle barrier to social inclusion (Pelleboer-Gunnink et al., 2019).

Different models characterise the historical understanding of the concept of disability: the medical model, the social model and the human rights model which are described in the following sections.

### 2.1.1. The Medical model

One of the most dominant approaches has been the medical model. It focused on the person's impairment and asserted the person's inability to contribute to society. Disability (seen as a defect) is defined as socially useless, abnormal and morally wrong. As a result, rehabilitation and medical approaches should fix it in order to enable persons with disability to contribute to their communities (Lisak, 2013:15).

This model is focused on a medical viewpoint of a person as an object of clinical intervention. It has been one of the most pervasive models supported by advances in science and medicine. This type of approach to disability dichotomises the state of the organism into normal and pathological making medical typology the basis for the description of the condition, the treatment and the prognosis (Igrić, 2004).

It gives power and influence to the medical community as an expert ruling the lives of persons with disabilities and defining what is meant by a normal human being. In descriptions of disability as a deviation from set standards, children with disabilities are classified as less valuable due to the deviation (adapted from Igrić, 2004). The medical model conceptualises disability as located within the individual due to their impairment requiring medical intervention for adaptation to society.

Attention is focused on difficulty and inability and society's activities and measures are directed towards establishing special services and procedures that will eliminate or mitigate the consequences of the defect (Alfirev, 2000). This is closely related to the institutional protection of persons with disabilities (Šostar et al., 2006) and the solution is seen in protection, care and risk avoidance (Mihanović, 2011). Perception of persons with disabilities as incapable of independent living and decision making (Kiš-Glavaš, 2012: 50) due to the limitations of the disability caused the dependence of persons with disabilities on persons who guide them and decide for them (parents, guardians, professionals, etc.) (Makvić Salaj, 2020: 2).

The main goal of rehabilitation is to change a person with disabilities in order for them to fit into natural social environment. Medical labels, most often seen as objective diagnoses, reflect social changes and political transformations. Despite this, the medical model is still predominantly used by different professionals when assessing the person's impairment and deciding upon schooling, vocational training, and ability to work (Zaviršek, 2007).

This approach is deeply rooted in the field of education and had influenced the formation of a dual education system (Krampač Grljušić, 2015). It is evident that within the medical model

persons with disabilities do not enjoy the right to be equal members of their communities as this model does not accept differences but is rather committed to the separation of those who are different or do not fit in the community (Popović and Buljevac, 2016)).

### 2.1.2. The Social model

Changes in the approach towards persons with disability started occurring when the term disability was redefined by focusing the attention on the capabilities of individuals. The transfer from an individual, medical perspective to a structural, social perspective has been described as the shift from a medical model to a social model in which people are viewed as being disabled by society rather than by their bodies (WHO and World bank, 2011).

The responsibility of society becomes crucial in the creation of disability due to the existence of different types of barriers in society. According to the social model of disability a person's impairment is not the cause of disability. Rather contrary, disability is the result of the way society is organised in that it disadvantages and excludes people with impairments. Within the social model, impairment is understood as a state of the body that is non-standard, defined as "lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body" (Goering, 2015: 135).

By redefining the approach to disability, attention in the social model is directed to the functional ability of persons which deepens the understanding of the person previously ascertained by a clinical/medical approach (Igrić, 2004).

Limitations are no longer in persons themselves but in the environment that limits these people as they are not aware of their full abilities and are not allowed to realize them (Igrić, 2004). From that perspective the existence of disability is perceived more as a social or cultural problem than medical, genetic or cognitive-psychological. The abilities (not the incapacities of the individual) are put in the foreground. In this model, the responsibility lies with the community, solutions are sought to change the environments that disable the individual (Alfirev, 2000:9) and emphasis is placed on social responsibility for the occurrence of disability due to social isolation and exclusion (Lisak, 2013).

The social model of disability emphasises societal attitudes and barriers towards people with disabilities as the main problems. The model challenges previous understanding of disability and distinguishes between the impairments that people have and the oppression which

they experience. Most importantly, the model defines disability as social oppression and not a form of impairment (Watson, 2004:2). From that perspective, disabled persons are an oppressed social group (Shakespeare, 2010: 3) and disability is defined as “the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities.” (Shakespeare, 2010: 3). The underlining principle of the model is not to deny the existence of an impairment but to argue it does not diminish the value of a person as a human being (Mihanović, 2011). This approach empowers persons who become aware that they are not to blame and that the problem lies in the society. Persons with disabilities do not have to change, the society does. They are not pitied anymore but feel empowered to fight for equal citizenship (Shakespeare and Watson, 2002:5).

Such approach has significant implications for inclusive education (Keller et al, 2007; Armstrong et al, 2011). The social model starts with the philosophy of inclusion and emphasises everyone’s belonging to a society and their unique contributions to diversity in abilities, opportunities and needs. It provides a foundation for change in access to education and highlights the role of education, stimulation of development and the potential of each child (Igrić, 2004).

In the social model, the approach to persons with disability is holistic. Each person should be actively involved in the construction of their own life. Emphasis should be placed on teamwork and cooperation of professionals, parents or guardians (legal representative) and person with disability (Mihanović, 2019:6).

In conclusion, it is necessary to say that the medical model and the social model are often presented as dichotomous. However, disability should neither be viewed as purely medical nor purely social (WHO & World Bank, 2011). Changes in the definition of disability are at the same time a reflection of changes in the overall approach to persons with disability (Popović and Buljevac, 2016). Political and environmental conditions can be an obstacle to the full realisation of their rights (Popović and Buljevac, 2016).

### 2.1.3. Human rights model

It is necessary to recognize and overcome the social, legal, economic and environmental conditions that act as a barrier to the full realization of persons with disabilities' rights. In this sense, the human rights model, is directed at the dignity of the human being, and only then at the person's medical condition if necessary (Alfirev, 2000). It is connected to the Madrid Declaration (EU, 2002) and it emphasises that disability is a matter of human rights. The human rights model seeks appropriate ways of respecting and supporting human diversity by creating conditions that enable the effective participation of a wide range of people, including persons with disability (European Union, 2012<sup>3</sup>).

Theoretical and practical approaches to persons with disabilities have changed with the development of a legislative approach that protects their rights. A society that adopts an inclusive approach represents the readiness of the environment to change and adapt to the needs of all its members. In an inclusive society, cooperation prevails instead of competition as group members communicate and help each other accepting there are children who have needs and wants different to that of the majority (adapted from Igrić, 2013). Conversely, ignorance, prejudice and fear that prevail in a society excludes persons and children with disabilities (Zrilić, Brzoja, 2013). Integration of persons with disabilities as well as other devalued persons in society cannot be achieved if they do not have the role of socially accepted and respected persons (Mihanović, 2019:21).

### 2.1.4. Implications of Disability Models

The abovementioned disability models impacted both research on persons with disabilities and the practical work of professionals (school teachers, special teachers, other social service workers) and the lives of people with disabilities. In this thesis, the starting point is the model of human rights, which serves as the fundamental basis for the approach of this research. Studies guided by the medical model of looking at people with disabilities previously conducted

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports/activities/reports/disability-special-needs-1>

studies have immediately excluded children and young adults with disability as important sources of information on their own personal ambitions and dreams for the future.

As the bulk of information was often provided by their parents, teachers or social workers (Ireland and Holloway, 1996, Oliver, 1992, 1997, Northway, 2000), such research lacked children with disabilities' standpoints (adapted from Stack et al., 2021).

The new approaches put the focus on the person with disability and their active participation in research (Chappell, 2000; Barnes, 2003; Walmsley, Johnson, 2003; Johnson, 2009; Turk et al., 2012; Walmsley and Central England People First, 2014).

The new goal of professional engagement is to promote persons' ability through various programs and take their experience into account. It attempts to see the situation from persons with disabilities' point of view as they become active participants in decision-making and research including planning and model creation, collecting and analysing data as well as distributing and applying results (Bourke, 2008).

They participate in research as a source of information rather than subjects of research. The decision to include persons with disabilities in research (inclusive research) followed their dissatisfaction with the traditional way of researching disability and the lack of participation (Mihanović, 2011). To understand the full scope of their needs, persons with disability must be heard. This enables the provision of adequate social support and care for persons with disability in their community (Alfirev, 2000). In inclusive research, persons with disabilities become experts for their experience and understanding of what is important, relevant and needed. Inclusive research is based on relevant factors such as: focusing on issues that will lead to a better quality of life for persons with disabilities; providing representation for their points of view; respecting persons with disabilities as researchers within the concept of human rights (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003).



## 2.2. The right to an inclusive education

In continuation of the previous section which addressed the process of changing the perception of disability through access to human rights, the chapter emphasises the importance of creating an inclusive society by respecting the right to an inclusive education for children with disabilities.

The right to equal upbringing and education for all children regardless of their differences as stated in the Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) provided a strong support for the “integration”<sup>4</sup> of children with disabilities into the regular education system. For years, declarations having moral force but not binding on the states parties had been accepted (Opačak, 2006). According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have fundamental and equally important rights that belong to them by birth without restrictions in all areas of their lives (Opačak, 2006).

Education is in itself considered a human right. At the same time, it is a necessary means of exercising other human rights. An education system that follows a human rights-based approach has a better starting point in fulfilling the fundamental mission of ensuring high-quality education for all (Gollob et al., 2010:19).

The CRC (UN, 1989) defines the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as one of the purposes of education. Therefore, it should not be necessary to specifically recognise the right of persons with disabilities to an inclusive education. However, for some persons these rights are conceived as natural while for others they are privileges (Cologon, 2013). Article 28 of CRC (UN, 1989) defines education as a right, while Article 29 (of CRC) states that a child’s education should be directed towards the “*full development of his or her personality, talents, mental and physical abilities*” (Gollob et al., 2010: 48). Schools, in accordance with children's rights, put the human dignity of children at the centre (Gollob et al., 2010: 20). In some countries, the understanding of children's rights (in the sense of children actively involved in decision-making concerning their lives) has been actively translated into certain education policies and practices (Igrić, 2015).

Human rights principles should be incorporated in a framework for pedagogical theory, testing abilities and measuring success of applying rights-based approach to education as well as an integral part of the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes. It

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<sup>4</sup> In that period, there was no talk of inclusion but of integration

means that educational policies, programmes and legal provisions on education will be assessed from a human rights perspective (Igrić, 2015).

Such approach to education is free from discriminatory beliefs, attitudes and practices, including ableism. Ableism involves discriminatory attitudes and practices arising from the perception that a person who experiences disability is in some sense inferior to a person who does not experience disability (Cologon, 2013). It also requires recognising and upholding the rights of all children and adults and understanding human diversity as a rich resource and an everyday part of all human environments and interactions (Cologon, 2013:6).

Inclusive education is one of the most important forms of social equality and acceptance and focuses on educational requirements and needs of all, children and adults alike, with a special emphasis on those disenfranchised and vulnerable by social exclusion and social marginalization. (Karamatić Brčić, 2011). The development and progress of society are conditional upon the reduction of differences in society which implies that inclusion is connected with excluding differences not only by respecting and tolerating differences but by devising social and educational measures to reduce them (Karamatić Brčić, 2011). Inclusive education involves embracing human diversity and welcoming all children and adults as equal members of an educational community. This involves regarding and supporting full participation of all persons in mainstream educational settings. Specifically, this involves the right to inclusive education at all levels in order to support “the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity” (UN, 2006). It has been linked to a child’s development and in particular the provision of educational opportunities to all children within educational systems (Armstrong et al, 2011).

Igrić (2013) points out that inclusion-oriented regular schools are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating communities that accept diversity and an inclusive society as well as providing education for all. The challenges brought forth by children’s differences should not be an excuse for inactivity and exclusion. Education and empowerment of children through learning and development is the key to an increasingly cohesive society.

In discussing educational opportunities of students with disabilities, terms such as integration and inclusion are often used. Integration must be distinguished from the concept of inclusion and the tendency to be used as its synonym. The terms integration and inclusion have referred to the placement and acceptance of students with disabilities into mainstream environments, however, they are not synonymous. Both integration and inclusion aim to bring students with disabilities into the mainstream classroom. However, integration expects students

to adapt to the pre-existing structure and inclusion ensures the existing education system adapts to each student.

The word integration involves the implementation of something that differs into a set of somewhat similar items and it involves a certain dose of coercion and passivation. It often means that the one who stands out is made to fit into the existing collective and the educational circumstances. In other words, to become part of the whole (Pavlić Cindrić, 2021)<sup>5</sup>.

Integration refers to divergent students being partially taught in a mainstream classroom (Seckington, 2018). Some activities are adapted for the student to fit in with their peers in a mainstream classroom and others are conducted in a special classroom. An integrated classroom is a setting where students with disabilities learn alongside peers without disabilities. Additional support may be provided to help them adapt to the regular curriculum and separate special education programmes are sometimes in place within the classroom or through pull-out services. In theory, integration is a positive approach that seeks to help students with disabilities be part of a larger group (Pavlić Cindrić, 2021).

Integration of students with disabilities can be a starting point for developing an inclusive model at school (Seckington, 2018). The implementation of the convention in practical terms began as the Integration of children with special needs into a regular education system (which failed to ensure the rights of children with disabilities). . Children are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of their disability or difficulty (UN, 2006).

The process of inclusion sought to introduce changes to the educational system to ensure the rights of children with disabilities, who, under the model of integration, were unable to exercise their fundamental human rights, including the right to education. In practice, under the name of inclusion, the rights of children with disabilities are still not being realized in accordance with the provisions of the Convention. (UNICEF, 2017).

Inclusion primarily presupposes providing equal opportunity to all and having maximum flexibility in meeting the specific educational and wider social needs of all school children (Kiš-Glavaš, 2001). As a philosophical idea, it starts from the premise that all children are different and all children can learn. Students with disabilities are not expected to adjust to a fixed educational structure. It is the structure that is adjusted to everyone's learning styles. Barriers to learning are removed to allow each student to participate fully in the curriculum and feel equally valued.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/hr/blog/inkluzija-vs-integracija>

Additionally, it depends on the social context, encouraging and creating opportunities for the development of harmonious relations within the classroom (Žic Ralić, Šifner, 2015). Acceptance of students with disabilities by their peers depends on the social skills of both groups. The result is the benefit of all students with and without disabilities.

The term inclusive education includes the provision of learning opportunities regardless of the specificities of children and appropriate support in the development and acquisition of competencies within the framework of regular upbringing and education (Luketić and Karamatić Brčić, 2018). If the needs of an individual are met, then the individual is approached holistically and as a valued citizen. Achieving this goal is the fundamental premise of inclusion. In other words, inclusion in its essence represents a shift from the medical model to the social model by focusing on everything that happens in the classroom and the school environment and aiming to remove obstacles to the child's learning (Abbott, 2007).

It can be argued that inclusion is the process of building a school community that accepts, supports and uses resources arising from differences (Žic Ralić, Šifner, 2015). Inclusion "requires ongoing engagement with removing barriers to active involvement and participation in shared learning" (Cologon, 2013:20; Tso et al, 2016). Therefore, inclusion implies a higher level of respect for children with disabilities and redefines matters in order for children and persons with disabilities be respected for who they are (Guštin, Šošić-Antunović, 2003).

Inclusive values should be put into action to ensure all children and adults belong, participate and flourish in society (Cologon, 2013). Narrow definitions of inclusion typically focus on the inclusion of one group while broader definitions focus on diversity and inclusion of all children (Cologon, 2013).

"In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, in the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration." (Article 3, UN, CRC, 1989). This refers to decisions made by governmental, administrative or legislative bodies, as well as decisions made by the family. Protecting and enhancing the rights of children and young persons with disabilities living in residential special schools is an important duty of society (Pellicano et al, 2014). However, it is understood that freedom is more important than protection and humanity is more important than competence (Igrić, 2004).

Children with disabilities possess the same rights as all other children: the right to family life, the right to participate in their communities, the right to shape the decisions that influence their lives, the right to be and feel safe and secure in their environment, and the right to an education which develops their potential and prepares them for adult life (Pellicano et al., 2014).

The needs of children with disabilities as full members of society who can and must have choices and opportunities to make decisions affecting their lives have to be kept in mind.

In children with disabilities education after over a century-long development, ideological problems are more present than the pedagogic. According to the CRC (UN, 1989), after learning, the second purpose of schools is to develop respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Implementing these rights is not always easy resulting in a disparity between the verbal formulation of rights and their practical application (Johnson and Clark, 2007 in Leitch and Mitchell, 2007). One of the avenues of realising the rights and emphasising the voices of children with disabilities as relevant is to conduct inclusive research (adapted from Igrić, 2013: 388).

Numerous research confirms inclusive education as every child's right to be a valued member of society and provided with equal opportunities to actively participate in and contribute to all areas of learning (Purdue, 2009, Wong & Cumming, 2010, Theodorou & Nind, 2010, Naraian, 2011; Armstrong et al., 2011). This requires all participants in an educational setting to be open to listening and learning including listening to and learning with children (Macartney & Morton, 2011).

Considering this, inclusion is not addressed only by placement into mainstream systems but by challenging the underlying attitudes in practice and affecting the educational experiences of students with disabilities (Cologon, 2013). As a result, the right to education for persons and children with disabilities must be ensured by the state in the form of creating legislative, legal and institutional frameworks, ensuring the implementation of positive regulations and measures, and creating conditions for educational inclusion.

These obligations are realized through legislation (Popović and Buljevac, 2016: 467). Education in general creates the foundations for combating poverty and creating fully inclusive societies. Therefore, persons with disabilities have the right to participate in all forms and levels of education on an equal basis with others.

Educational institutions and the relevant legislation must provide the conditions for an inclusive approach (Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, 2021:17). Set up in this manner, the system should be supportive, enable the provision of fundamental human rights and recognise children's basic needs which is the main incentive for this thesis. It deals with the possibilities for education of students with disabilities in Croatia with special emphasis on the transition period from primary to secondary school and providing students with disabilities with the support needed in that specific period of life.

### 2.3. Education of children with disabilities in Croatia (national context)

The subchapter describes the education system in Croatia and the opportunities for students with disabilities as well as addresses the problems still existing in the practical implementation of children with disabilities' rights.

For the purpose of clarity, it is necessary to explain that Croatia is a Central European and Mediterranean country bordering Slovenia in the west, Hungary in the north, Serbia in the east and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the south. Croatia is a member of the European Union since 1 July 2011., Zagreb is the largest city with more than 800,000 inhabitants as well as the capital. The research was conducted in Zagreb in an institution which is under the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social policy's jurisdiction but provides education according to a special curriculum.

Primary education in Croatia is compulsory and free for all children between the ages of six and sixteen who are its residents regardless of nationality. The education of children with disabilities is an integral part of the Croatian educational system guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia<sup>6</sup>. Article 65 of the Constitution prescribes the obligation to educate young persons with disabilities and it stipulates that a physically and mentally disabled child has the right to special care and education available to all, under equal conditions, in accordance with their abilities.

The right to participate in education for children with disabilities is determined by the National Act on Education in Primary and Secondary School<sup>7</sup> (Article 4) and accompanying Ordinances (Ordinance on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Disabilities<sup>8</sup>, Ordinances on the number of students in regular and combined classrooms and educational groups in the primary school<sup>9</sup>, State Educational Standard of primary education system<sup>10</sup>). In the Croatian educational system, children and students with disabilities are recognized as those *“children and students whose abilities in interaction with environmental factors limit their full and effective participation in the educational process on an equal basis with other students and*

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<sup>6</sup> Official Gazette, No. 56/90, 135/97, 08/98, 113/00, 124/00, 28/01, 41/01, 55/01, 76/10, 85/10, 05/14

<sup>7</sup> Official Gazette, No. 87/08, 86/09, 92/10, 105/10, 90/11, 5/12, 16/12, 86/12, 126/12, 94/13, 152/14, 07/17, 68/18, 98/19, 64/20, 151/22, 155/23, 156/23

<sup>8</sup> Official Gazette, No. 24/2015

<sup>9</sup> Official Gazette, No. 124/09 and 73/10

<sup>10</sup> Official Gazette, No. 3/2008

*arise primarily from physical, mental, intellectual, sensory impairments and dysfunctions, and then difficulty in mastering teaching content (learning) or difficult adaptation to school tasks and activities (emotional and behavioural disorders)” (Eurydice, 2018).*

Primary and Secondary Education Act (Article 63) differentiates three groups of children with disabilities” ...*students with disabilities; students with learning difficulties, behavioural problems and emotional problems; students with special needs conditioned by educational, social, economic, cultural and linguistic factors” (Article 65, Paragraph 1).*

The types of difficulties defined in Paragraph 1 of the Article according to which the students with disabilities are entitled to appropriate educational programs and forms of support is determined by the Minister of Science, Education and Youth. Furthermore, the Minister of Science, Education and Youth provides special curricula for the education of students with disabilities (Article 65, Paragraph 2). In this sense, the first group corresponds to students with developmental disabilities.

It is important to highlight the national context of understanding the term students with disabilities as it is regularly incorrectly translated and used as "disability" for all groups of students with any difficulties, bodily injuries, chronic diseases, etc. Formal translation of the term persons and children with disabilities is contained in the Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (Croatian Parliament, 2007). Translation of the word disabilities (*invaliditet* in Croatian) is not in line with the social model as the UN Council warned (Lisak, 2013).

It is inappropriate as the Croatian term *invaliditet* itself focuses on the person and their inability. The term *invalid* comes from the Latin term *invalidus* which means weak, powerless, worthless, incapacitated. In this context, the term person with a disability (*osoba s invaliditetom* in Croatian) refers to persons who are weak, powerless, unworthy or incompetent which is incorrect or contrary to the approach to human rights and modern understandings of the term (Lisak, 2013).

The terminological confusion results in different institutions using different terms for persons with disabilities (Marinić, 2008), which negatively impacts cooperation between ministries involved. The terms used in the thesis refer to the field of education of students with disabilities and are prescribed by the Ordinance on primary and secondary education of students with disabilities.

According to all international documents that Croatia ratified, signatory states must adopt policies recognizing persons with disabilities' rights to equal educational opportunities and



enabling education of persons with disabilities, in the general education system to the fullest possible extent (Resolution 37/52, UN, 1982). In making decisions or performing actions that affect a child or children in general, their welfare must be paramount (CRC, UN, 1989: 1).

Special education is considered only in cases where regular schooling systems still do not sufficiently take into account the needs of students with disabilities. In such cases, special education is to be aimed at preparing students for full inclusion (Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, UN, 1993). Understanding education as a process that improves children's ability to contribute to and fully participate in their communities, excluding children with disabilities from school or discriminating against them in the education system prevents them from taking advantage of opportunities and available resources throughout life (Igrić, 2015). It is essential that educational curricula be modernized and systematized and it is of the utmost interest of the state to establish a monitoring system after the completion of primary education (Zrilić, Brzoja, 2013: 146). This is supported by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations on the Combined 5th and 6th Periodic Reports of Croatia (UN, June 2022, pp 1)<sup>34</sup> "...to the recommendations concerning the specific areas, in respect of which urgent measures must be taken:" ... As the State did not take sufficient measures, the Committee recommended that it needs to ensure all professionals working with and for children, in particular the judiciary, social workers, law enforcement officials, health-care personnel, teachers, immigration and asylum officers, professionals and staff working in all forms of alternative care, as well as the media, receive mandatory training on children's rights.

Proficiency assessment often leads to specific interventions including programme adjustments and changes in the type of schooling the student with disabilities is referred to. This is directly linked to the practice of labelling children according to their assessed learning ability and often results in expulsion from mainstream schools and being referred to special schools. In an institution based on a normative concept of success, special education seems natural to students who achieve poorer results precisely because they are labelled as different (Reid and Knight, 2006).

Until recently, special education has been dominated by a psycho-medical paradigm which focuses on the assumption that deficits are located in individual students (Mitchell, 2010). Data in various European documents state that many children and young persons with disabilities are enrolled in special schools that are always effective bridges to a regular education system, continuing education or labour market (Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, 2021:18).



The tendency is to supplement educational policies with continuous support from the States and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education<sup>11</sup>. The situation is similar in Croatia.

Namely, once students with disabilities enter special education, usually in primary school, they no longer have the opportunity to enrol in one of the regular secondary school programmes (or any form of higher education in the regular education system (Parekh and Brown, 2018).

Instead of reducing the gap in achievement through support and specialized services, special education has become a means systematically distancing students from opportunities for equal and quality education (Igrić, 2015: 63) to facing them with major obstacles of living apart from their family as well as reducing choices in later life. With this in mind, the right to an inclusive education as well as the possibility of choosing and transitioning to further education should be a normative right of every child with disabilities. However, this is often not the case.

Different reports show a similar percentage of students with disabilities that are enrolled in the educational system. According to the Annual Ombudsman Report for 2020<sup>12</sup>(for the school year 2019/2020), 24 662 students with disabilities were enrolled in primary schools in Croatia, which is 7.8 % of all primary school students. Data shows that 603 students with disabilities were accommodated in social welfare institutions (March 2021), 480 of which were educated according to the primary school curriculum. The data from the Ministry of Science, Education and Youth for the school year 2021/2022 indicates there were 23 533 students with disabilities in primary schools which made 8,38% of all primary school students and 2684 which makes 11.41% students with disabilities of all students were attending special institutions. These figures reveal still an existing pattern of placing students with disabilities in various forms of educational programmes, some of which take place in special schools or institutions, separating student with disabilities.)

Furthermore, data from the Croatian Register of Persons with Disabilities<sup>13</sup> records 59,659 children with disabilities under the age of 17 (as of January 17, 2022), which represents an increase in the number of children with disabilities compared with the previous year.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.european-agency.org/>

<sup>12</sup> Ombudsman. (2020). Annual Ombudsman Report for 2020 (for the school year 2019/2020);

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.healthinformationportal.eu/health-information-sources/croatian-disabilities-registry>  
<https://www.zakon.hr/z/3178/Zakon-o-Registru-osoba-s-invaliditetom>

### 2.3.1. Process of assessing the child's psychophysical condition

Students with disabilities' start the process of enrolment in primary school with a statutory procedure for assessing the psychophysical condition of the child. The assessment determines the most appropriate programme of education and the necessary support, methods and teaching aids during compulsory education (based on the Ordinance on the Process of Assessing the Psychophysical State of Children and Students and the Structure of Expert Committees<sup>14</sup> and the Ordinance on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Disabilities).

A Decision on an Appropriate Form of Education is a document which states that a student with disabilities is to have an individualized approach during education or is to attend primary education according to the special educational curriculum for students with disabilities. It is made by the Expert Committee appointed by the county Office of Education according to the recommendation of the School Professional Team.<sup>15</sup>

The appropriate educational programmes are determined according to limitations, difficulties, and disabilities as set down in the Difficulties Orientation List which is an integral part of the abovementioned Ordinance on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Disabilities. Its purpose is to define the appropriate programme and professional support for each student with disabilities. The Committee makes a proposal on the pedagogic-didactic adaptation needed by students with disabilities.

There are four form of appropriate programs for students with disabilities: (1) the regular programme with individualized procedures, (2) regular programme with content adaptation and individualized procedures (Article 5), (3) special program with individualized procedures (Article 6) and (4) special programs for acquiring competencies in activities of daily living and work with individualized procedures (Article 8 and 9 of the Ordinance on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Disabilities<sup>16</sup>).

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<sup>14</sup> Official Gazette, No 67/2014

<sup>15</sup> School Professional Team of each school, consisting of a psychologist, education expert- pedagogue and special teacher - University Master in Educational Rehabilitation (educational rehabilitation expert), Speech therapist.

<sup>16</sup> Official Gazette, No 24/2015

Taking into account students' disabilities and educational needs, a regular programme with an individualized approach and a customized programme are implemented by each school. Children with minor intellectual disabilities are included in mainstream classes and taught according to the general regular curriculum with the help of individualized plans or specific curricula adjusted to their capabilities.

The operative part of the Decision must also state additional educational and rehabilitation programs if they were determined during the procedure for determining the child's psychophysical condition, as well as an indication of whether the appropriate program applies to individual subjects (specify them) or to the entire curriculum (Article 4, paragraph 4 of the Ordinance on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Disabilities). In practice, main educational subjects (such as Maths, Croatian language, Foreign language, Biology, etc.) can be mastered in a special classroom department and other subjects such as Art and Music in the primary classroom. The main educational subjects are taught by an educational rehabilitation expert in cooperation with the regular teacher, and other subjects are taught solely by the teacher.

All students with disabilities have the right to additional assistance from a special teacher (educational rehabilitation expert) and trained teaching assistants which is carried out in a designated classroom of the school when the student's difficulties pose a threat to their safety or the safety of other students or when students come from dysfunctional families.

Students with disabilities in mainstream school have the right to be educated among their peers. However, special institutions without architectural barriers are located in larger cities resulting in some children with disabilities are educated away from their families.

For example, students with motor disabilities have to attend a school or a special institution adapted to the needs of persons in wheelchairs which are far from their homes as most mainstream school buildings cannot be adapted to their needs due to their age or construction.

In cases when students with disabilities cannot master the abovementioned forms of education in regular schools, a special educational curriculum is created. It is based on the regular curriculum and adapted according to the student's abilities and skills.

Students with specific disabilities are included in special programmes in mainstream schools. In cases when the children need additional health and programs of rehabilitation, students with disabilities attending special educational institutions where special programmes with individualized procedures or special programmes for acquiring competences and practicing everyday life and work activities are carried out.

These programmes are carried out in Centres for Education most of which are out of the regular educational system. They are part of the social welfare system under the jurisdiction of

the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy. However, the implementation of the programme and the special curriculum is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Science, Education and Youth. Students with disabilities are placed in social care institutions as a result of poor living conditions (poverty, dysfunctional family relationships, etc.) or due to behavioural problems for which mainstream schools have not found appropriate educational procedures. The placement of students with disabilities in an institution is a form of systematic solution that ensures primary accommodation for students with disabilities in accordance with their specific life situation and education according to a special program in accordance with individual needs.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR OBSERVING TRANSITION

The chapter presents theoretical frameworks of factors that affect individual's development, especially in the transition period, and the extent to which the individual's environment plays a role in mutual interaction of different subsystems. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979, 1986) of human development, is presented as a suitable framework for examining the transition that students with disabilities encounter during their schooling and beyond (Strnadova and Commings, 2014). In addition, it presents the association of different factors in creating strategies for individual transition planning (ITP) which envisages systematic monitoring and support to each individual shown through Kohler's Taxonomy model, in order to facilitate successful transition from one life stage to another.

#### 3.1. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model

"Children do not grow up in isolation, nor emerge as adults from childhood development vacuums. Rather, human character and competence are shaped by the continuity and change in families, schools, peer groups and neighbourhood communities" (Sabates and Dex, 2012:5).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1994) focuses on the quality and context of a child's environment. The model is presented as one of the most prominent developmental theories to express the importance of understanding a reciprocal and dynamic set of interactions between individuals, their families and their environments (Sabates and Dex, 2012: 5). Therefore, it provides a useful framework to examine the processes involved in transitions for students with disabilities attending special schools (Bronfenbrenner, 1997; 2004). Bronfenbrenner described it as a theory of human development. From the start the developing individual was consistently viewed as influencing, and being influenced by, the environment. Subsequent reformulations of his original ideas resulted in increase in the role played by the individual; the impact of time; and most important of all, proximal processes<sup>17</sup>.

The bioecological theory of human development, initially termed ecological model or approach, was originally proposed by Bronfenbrenner to explain how human development occurs

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<sup>17</sup>engines of development (Avellar Merçon-Vargas, 2020); Bronfenbrenner viewed proximal processes as having positive effects on development (by increasing competency or buffering dysfunction) (Avellar Merçon-Vargas, 2020); Proximal processes are the development processes of systematic interaction between person and environment (Bergen, 2008).

focusing largely on the impact of context. Nonetheless, as denoted by his use of the word *ecology*, Bronfenbrenner viewed development as emerging from the interaction of the individual and the context (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). Utilizing Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1979), Bašić, Koller-Trbović, and Uzelac (2004) argue that the social environment in interaction with an individual's experience determines the degree to which an individual can develop and realize their potential in psychological (psychosocial) and physical sense. As a theory of human development, Bronfenbrenner places the child at the centre and this positioning is supposed to demonstrate that the child, to a great degree, is influenced by her context. However, it also highlights the child's agency and potential influence. Such a model makes the child a subject and agent and not a passive "product" of her own surroundings, thus providing conditions for intellectual, emotional, social, and moral development (Sadownik, 2023: 85)

The foundation for the ecological system consists of four ecosystems formed around the child:

1. *The microsystems* - where a child lives at certain times; family, school, neighbourhood;
2. *The mesosystems* - where a child lives in a relationship between multiple microsystems; family, school, family and neighbourhood, family and local community;
3. *The exosystems* - exposure systems and places where a child is not an active participant but which affect them; parents' job, school authorities, and leisure organizations; The structures in this layer impact the child's development by interacting with structures in their microsystem (Berk, 2000 according to Paquette and Rayn, 2000).
4. *The macrosystems* - may be considered the outermost layer in the child's environment; it defines the larger social system in which the child does not function directly; a wider local community, a company providing instructions for exo-, meso-, and microsystems and dictates changes in them (Paquette and Rayn, 2000); While not a specific framework, this layer is comprised of cultural values, customs, and laws (Berk, 2000 according to Paquette and Rayn, 2000).
5. *The chronosystem* – encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to a child's environment;

Elements within this system can be either external (the time of a parent's death) or internal (the physiological changes that occur with child's ageing). As children get older, they may react differently to environmental changes and be abler to determine how these changes influence them (Paquette and Rayn, 2000).

Bronfenbrenner himself argues that in ecological models of development, the main effects are likely to be interactions between process, person, context, and time (Sabates and Dex, 2012: 5). The model considers all students' relationships (family, school, peers) to be

microsystems which, in turn, exist in broader systems such as the community (Strnadova and Cumming, 2014). The author of this model was also interested in the family as an institution. The family thus plays a key role in three ways: firstly, as a microsystem context in which development occurs, secondly, in terms of the personal characteristics of all individuals in the family; but most importantly, in terms of the interactions among family members as part of proximal processes (Rosa and Tudge, 2013).

The interactions of the various microsystems are known as mesosystems. Microsystems are institutional patterns of culture, such as the economy, customs, and body of knowledge. When a student transitions, another environment is added, one which must exist and interact with the current systems while also presenting a whole new subsystem with its requirements. Bronfenbrenner describes the chronosystem as change or consistency in the individual or the environment over time and how this affects the development of the individual overall (Strnadova and Cumming, 2014).

Bronfenbrenner initially (1979 according to Weatling Neal and Neal, 2013) described ecological systems at different levels as *nested* within one another giving rise to Ecological Systems Theory's classic graphic portrayal as a set of concentric circles (Figure 1).

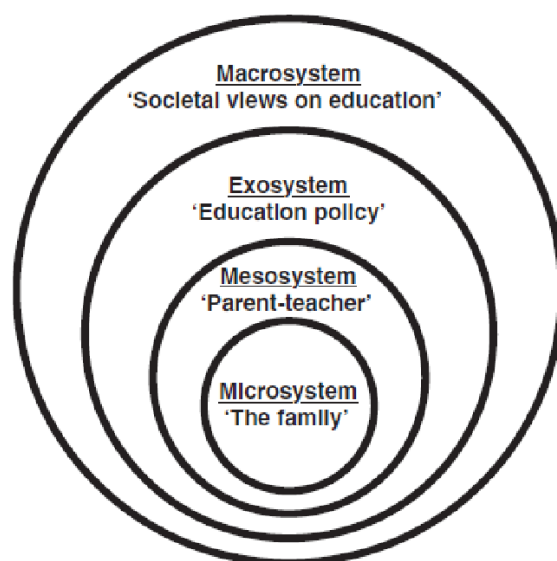


Figure 1. Nested Model of Ecological System originally proposed by Bronfenbrenner, 1979 (adapted from Weatling and Neal, 2013)

At the lowest level of his nested hierarchy, microsystems are settings where the focal individual plays a direct role, has direct experiences and has direct social interactions with others. The family is a microsystem where the child plays a direct role (e.g., daughter, sibling), has direct

experiences (e.g., enjoying family meals), and has direct social interactions with others (e.g., reading with mom, teasing baby brother).

Mesosystems, within which microsystems are nested, include social interactions between two microsystems of the focal individual. In the above-mentioned example, a mesosystem includes a meeting between a parent (from the child's family setting) and a teacher (from the child's school setting) about a child's classroom behaviour.

Exosystems, within which mesosystems are nested, include settings that influence the focal individual but in which the focal individual does not directly participate. An individual child generally does not play a role in or have direct experiences with the education policy-making community. However, mainstream educational policies nonetheless influence the child's classroom and school experiences.

Finally, macrosystems, within which exosystems are nested, include broad cultural influences or ideologies that have long-term consequences for the focal individual (Weatling Neal and Neal, 2013).

Bioecological theory in its advanced form specifies that researchers should study the settings in which a developing individual spends time and their relations with others in these, as well as personal characteristics of the individual and those with whom they typically interact. In addition, individuals' development over time, the historical context in which they live, and the mechanisms that drive development (proximal processes) should be studied.

From a methodological point of view, bioecological theory favours the study of proximal processes that are likely to lead to healthy development with the developing individuals of interest being distinguished in at least one relevant characteristic and studied in more than a single context (almost always the typical settings in which the individuals are found) (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). Paquette and Ryan (2000) state that as a child develops, the interaction within these environments becomes more complex.

As presented at the beginning of this chapter, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1994) is an appropriate framework for examining the transition period for students with disabilities, their schooling experience and aspirations in life because it is focused on the quality and context of the child's environment. Furthermore, the theory argued that environments change people just as people change the environment (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Great emphasis is put on the active role of the child while interacting with various social norms and systems (Piaget & Inhelder, 2000 according to Rojas-Drummond, 2016). Milsom (2007) believes that to plan the successful transitions of students with disabilities, the



relationships that exist between and among these systems must be examined before the transition (Strnadova and Commings, 2014).

When planning specific activities to support transition, it is important to think about the specific roles and involvement of all key persons: students, teachers, parents and professionals. Involving students means allowing them to play an active role in what is important to them personally, what they want to achieve, the type of support they need, and who they need it from.

The role of the educator and teacher is to describe the experiences of socialisation and inclusion, the individualisation processes, the programmes implemented and the outcomes achieved for the student, and to make suggestions for further support (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016).

After family, school plays a key role in the development of the child. The school environment is one of the key socialization environments, one of life's arenas in which a child tests and develops their competencies. Scientists rank school very close to a child's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bašić, 2001) claiming that school is the most natural environment for the child along with family (Bašić, 2009). One of the primary goals of school is to help students plan and prepare for the rest of their lives (Kellems and Morningstar, 2010). School as a new socialization environment becomes a place where children and young people test their growth and develop relationships with peers and adults who are not part of their primary safe environment (Maglica and Jerković, 2014). For all students, and especially for children with disabilities, a stimulating environment with peers, acceptance, and a sense of belonging play extremely important roles in academic success, emotional development, and positive self-image (Vranjican et al, 2019; Krampač-Grljušić, 2015).

Support is crucial in the transition period and communication between systems should be comprehensive, planned, two-way and have clear objectives. It has to be emphasized that the support in the transition period must be appropriately executed by all systems. Each system should fulfil its obligations depending on the segment of the greatest influence and without reducing the level of support of other systems. In the function of successful transition from one life stage to another, it is necessary to compile different factors in creating a strategy for individual transition planning which envisages systematic monitoring and support to each individual that will be shown through Kohler's Taxonomy discussed in the following chapter.

### 3.2. Kohler's Taxonomy

In addition to interventions that are recommended in line with the ecological model (previous chapter 2.6.1.1.), examination of special education literature reveals several initiatives and practices that are considered essential for successful transitioning of students with disabilities from one setting to another. Outcomes of these initiatives include an expanded perspective concerning transition education and services and the identification of practices that apply this perspective to individual student needs (Kohler and Sharon, 2003).

In terms of education, the most common transitions that school-age students face are the transition from nursery school to primary school, the transition from classroom to subject teaching and the transition from primary to secondary school (Perry & Dockett, 2006; Strnadova and Cumming, 2014). In all transitions: from preschool to primary education, from classroom to subject teaching and from primary to secondary school; the experience of transition, as well as the child's wider development, are influenced by a range of factors that need to be taken into account and are related to all key stakeholders involved in providing support during transition periods. The essential practice is transition planning (Riches, 1996). Transition planning should be an ongoing dynamic process designed to help the student achieve his or her long-term goals (Kellems and Morningstar, 2010). Seen through a transition perspective, the educational planning process consists of the following three steps: (a) post-school goals are identified based on student abilities, needs, interests, and preferences; (b) instructional activities and educational experiences are developed to prepare students for their post-school goals; and (c) a variety of individuals, including the student, work together to identify and develop the goals and activities (Kohler & Rusch, 1996 by Kohler, 1996).

Personally Oriented Planning provides new opportunities and sees children with disabilities as active participants in the process of planning and evaluating their support and services (adapted according Krampač-Grljušić, 2015). In this process, children need to see themselves as one of the most important actors and a study of their interests and their ideas regarding the future may add to our understanding of children's motives and the need for support in the preparation process (Pellicano et al., 2014). The above mentioned type of study and the entire process of planning assist in the protection and promotion of the rights of children and young people especially those accommodated in special schools and educational institutions. Test et al. (2009) identified 16 predictors associated with better post-school outcomes, such as

mainstream education engagement, parental engagement, self-determination, social skills development, peer support, as well as planned and organized transition programmes.

Kohler's taxonomy is the only research-based transition model in literature (, Aspel and Everson (2006), According to Test 2009; Beamish et al, 2010; Kohler, 1996; Kohler & Field, 2003). In general, this concept represents the perspective that transition planning is the fundamental basis of education that guides the development of students' educational programmes, including strategies that keep them in school, rather than an add-on activity for students with disabilities when they turn 14 or 16 (Kohler et al, 2017). Transition services are highly individualized and what might work for one student may not be appropriate for another. Planning and preparation are especially important for students with disabilities (Kellems and Morningstar, 2010). As one of the most comprehensive and widely accepted frameworks of quality transition practice, it is used in this doctoral thesis as a grounded model which enables comparison of existing forms of support in the transition period from primary to secondary school for adolescents with disabilities in Croatia. In addition, it enables the possible suggestions of necessary interventions of the support system within the educational system.

The Taxonomy or Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996; Kohler & Field, 2003) represents concrete strategies that operationalize the transition perspective and is a consumer-oriented paradigm built on student and family involvement and students' self-determination (Kohler et al, 2003). The Taxonomy for Transition Programming, with practices organized according to five key areas (Figure 2), are indicative of successful transition-focused programming and an outcome-oriented planning process. Those five broad areas are:

- (1) student-focused planning,
- (2) student development,
- (3) interagency collaboration,
- (4) family involvement and
- (5) program structure (Kohler et al, 2017).

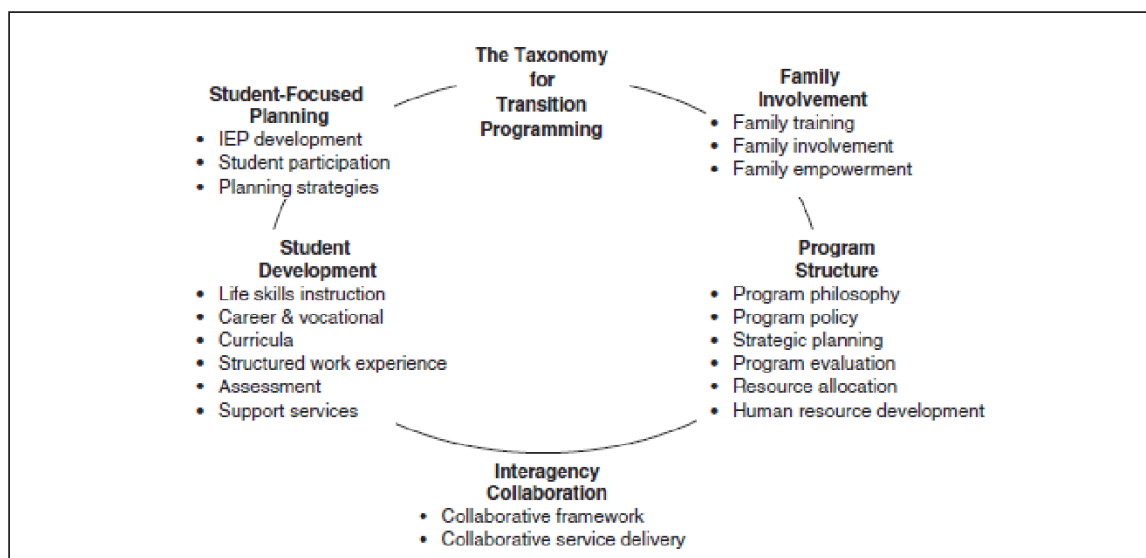


Figure 2. The Taxonomy for Transition Programing, Kohler, 1996.

Each of the five areas is further divided into subcategories of specific activities as well as descriptors of certain transition practices. It includes additional practices in the areas of student support and the instructional context within Student Development, as well as school climate in Program Structure.

In Family Engagement, a focus on cultural relevancy, empowerment, and family preparation are emphasized. Collaboration with agencies providing support before and during school and post-school transitions is emphasized across categories (Kellems and Morningstar, 2010).

Milsom (2007) believes that to plan successful transition of students with disabilities, the relationships that exist between and among these systems must be examined before the transition itself. For example, attitudes and expectations about transition held by parents and teachers need to be studied together with the communication between one school and another school as well as between the school and the home. It is also imperative that all participants of the educational process recognise the importance of these relationships through all phases of the transition as communication and collaboration are key to effective planning and implementation (Strnadova and Cumming, 2014). Although their perspectives differ, positive relationships between the participants in the transition process: schools, children and their parents can help mitigate the challenges presented by transition (van Rens et al., 2018).

School is an important place for learning social interaction, making friends, giving and receiving social support, as well as obtaining knowledge and skills needed by students with disabilities and typical students. These skills will help demonstrate appropriate measurable

inclusion goals, based on age-appropriate transition assessments after schooling. They should be related to education and training, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills to facilitate the students' movement through the system (adapted according to IDEA, 2004<sup>18</sup>).

The transition from primary to secondary school involves major changes in the environment that can strain the student's sense of personal efficacy and competence Forgan and Vaughn (2000). This specific transition, is likely to be the key period in children's development characterised by significant changes in their social and physical environment (Pearson et al, 2017). The period demands changes in students' physical environment, social circles, and teachers (e.g., moving from a single teacher to several subject specialist teachers, a larger school population, increasing academic difficulty) (Strnadova et al, 2016).

Adolescents move from a personalized school environment of familiar peers to a new and more demanding milieu. There are significant changes in peer groups with concerns about social acceptance often causing loss of self-esteem, failures in academic performance and rising levels of anxiety and depression (Akos, 2006; Frey et al., 2009). Finally, the overall experience of transition is influenced by the systematic conditions provided by the education system. This refers to whether or not the system provides legal and legislative conditions as well as material and personnel conditions for support during the transition process, and whether or not the principles of inclusion are applied in educational practice. The application of the principle of inclusion means respecting diversity, the acceptance of every pupil regardless of the basis of diversity, and a willingness to adapt and support (Šenjug Užarević et al, 2023).

Each transition places very specific demands on students and their families as well as teachers and professionals (Strnadova et al, 2016). During transition, planning provides individual student with support to identify and achieve, or move closer to, their career and lifestyle aspirations. Young persons supported in this manner as they leave or change schools must “get it right” and follow best practices which includes:

- (1) allowing the young person to direct the process,
- (2) involving parents and families,
- (3) providing information on post-school options,
- (4) transitioning is a coordinated and recognised process considered necessary by schools, parents, students and agencies working in partnership<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2004). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); More explanation on pp 50. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.education.govt.nz/school/student-support/special-education/national-transition-guidelines-for-students-with-additional-learning-needs/national-transition-guidelines/>

To actively participate in this process, students must practice self-advocacy skills to express their self-awareness of important topics, important behaviours that are often challenging to develop and apply. Self-advocacy in a group setting and self-reflection are considered fundamental aspects of self-determination and their application is an important component of student-focused planning (Hoffman & Field, 1995; Kohler and Field, 2003).

An important aspect of student-focused planning is that educational decisions are based on students' goals, visions, and interests. Therefore, it is important to facilitate the development of the student's self-awareness and use this information to set short- and long-term goals (O'Neill et al, 2016). A systematic transition process contributes to the probability of students' better post-school outcomes (Patton et al, 2016).

To prepare students with disabilities for the transition process and decision-making in life, it is necessary to promote stable, trusting relationships, foster connections with the community during schooling and beyond, and place the child at the centre of decision-making in school (adapted according to Pellicano et al, 2014).

Transition best practices require students to work with a variety of people during the educational planning process: psychologists, general educators, special educators, school administrators, agency personnel, and their parents or guardians. Teams of experts are the basis of cooperation which is achieved through the exchange of information and transdisciplinary work. The role of the special needs professional and their cooperation with other members of the professional team is extremely important in working with children with disabilities. The team should ensure that all relevant information is systematically collected and shared, the support meets the child's individual needs, strengths are promoted, and progress is systematically assessed. Strengths are defined as child's intellectual, physical and interpersonal skills and abilities, as well as interests and motivation for activities (O'Kane & Murphy, 2016).

The provision of individualised transition plans (ITPs) within or alongside Individual educational plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities in order to improve post-school outcomes is seen as an essential practice (Mazzotti et al., 2014 in O'Neil et al, 2016). One of the most interesting challenges facing educators who wish to develop and implement transition programmes that improve the post-school outcomes is to determine what practices lead to improved outcomes for students with disabilities (Kohler & Field, 2003).

Key elements of transition policy are the promotion of better coordination of services and full involvement of young persons and their families in the transition process particularly through person-centred planning (Clarke et al., 2011).

The majority of research on the transition period for students with disabilities (from preschool to primary education, from classroom to subject teaching, from primary to secondary education, from secondary education into the residential community or onto the labour market) is conducted in English-speaking countries.

This gap in literature becomes even more apparent when we look at child-centred collaborative approaches to transition of children with disabilities (with complex support needs) (Welchons & McIntyre, 2017). Although it is widely believed that adolescents with disabilities face the same multitude of changes in their transition to adulthood as typically developing peers (Gillan, Coughlan, 2010), there are certain differences and additional challenges (Caton & Kagan, 2007).

Research shows that transition represents several changes for children and their families and it is described as an important milestone (Eckert et al. 2008) and a sensitive developmental period (Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2000) for young children. In addition, it suggests that parents wish to be active participants in preparation but may not know how to best support their children's transition (McIntyre et al., 2010). One of the most commonly cited difficulties during the transition to postschool options is the move from special schools which typically offer specialised support such as therapy, specialists, and social services to mainstream environments which often lack even the most basic support services (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010).

In Croatia, some students with disabilities do not continue their education after finishing obligatory primary school. Such environmental changes often profoundly affect children's psychological makeup. In order to understand how changes in the school environment impact specific areas of adolescent psychology needs to be understood in that it develops from interactions between people and their environments (adapted from Symonds and Galton, 2014). Taking this information as well as the educational opportunities for students with disabilities in Croatia described in Chapter 2.3. into consideration, this research aims to contribute to respecting the individual experience of adolescents with disabilities living in a special institution. In addition, it aims to gain insight into how ready adolescents with disabilities are for the transition from primary school in a special institution to secondary school outside the institution, and whether they have the support of experts during this period. Information on whether the system recognizes the importance of personally oriented planning and monitoring of the transition period for students with disabilities will be obtained.



#### 4. PROBLEM AND AIMS OF STUDY

This chapter explains the selection of the research problem.

The theoretical framework of this research is based on the social model of disability and access to human rights that are presented in Chapter 2.2. recognising the indisputable rights of children with disabilities to actively participate in making decisions about their future lives and their transition process. From that point of view, the emphasis in the research is placed on the need for their voices to be heard and for them to be the basis for changing the perspective on the position of children with disabilities in society. Particular emphasis was placed on the Croatian educational system and understanding of disability within the society which are still not suitable and in accordance with the ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989) and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006).

Most Croatian laws and regulations support certain segregated forms of care which are mainly centred on the needs of institutions not users themselves (Teodorović, Bratković, 2001). The laws in Croatia determine children with disabilities' right to education among other children (Act on Elementary and Secondary Education<sup>20</sup>).

However, care systems for students with disabilities are still centralized and ideas about rehabilitation, education, and training of students with disabilities are primarily seen as the function of protection (Umaefulam, 2022). This perspective is directed from the medical model showing that the students with disabilities are incapable of leading a normal life due to their disabilities, that they can receive better care and support in institutions, and that it's better for them and their families to be in the institution. As a result, students with disabilities are often separated from their families and educated in institutions usually located in different parts of the country. This can affect students with disabilities' emotions and be a cause of poor self-image.

The aim of the research of the thesis is to understand and interpret the what significance the daily experiences in the institution hold for a group of adolescents with disabilities in the transition period from primary to secondary school. Therefore, they were given an active role in interpreting the interactions with various social norms and systems (peers, family, professional staff, different types of schools, etc.). Identification and interpretation of the meaning of their interactions with all the systems were primarily discussed in semi-structured interviews. By

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<sup>20</sup> Official Gazette, No 87/2008, 86/2009, 92/2010, 105/2010, 90/2011, 5/2012, 16/2012, 86/2012, 126/2012, 94/2013, 152/2014, 07/2017, 68/2018, 98/2019, 64/2020, 151/2022, 156/2023



analysing the data collected by interviewing adolescents with disabilities, the objective was to determine the existence of connections and interactions among the systems and norms that are similar to those presented in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development and to show their influence and importance through the experiences of adolescents with disabilities. Answering the questions of how young people perceive their life in the institution and how they are prepared to transition from it was attempted.

Additionally, as education of students with disabilities is divided between the jurisdiction of two ministries (Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy and Ministry of Science, Education and Youth) due to insufficient recognition of their needs and not providing them with sufficient support in all aspects of everyday life, students with disabilities (and their families) must meet the requirements of both systems which is not always easy or even possible.

Bearing in mind the problems in the support system, the main purpose of this thesis is to better understand the experience of young people who were separated from their families and educated in a large institution and are now leaving such education. The data answers the question of how young people perceive their life in the institution and how they are being prepared to transition from it.

Taking this information as well as the educational opportunities for students with disabilities in Croatia described in Chapter 2.3. into consideration, this research aims to contribute to respecting the individual experience of adolescents with disabilities living in a special institution. In addition, it aims to gain insight into how ready adolescents with disabilities are for the transition from primary school in a special institution to secondary school outside the institution, and whether they have the support of experts during this period. Information on whether the system recognizes the importance of personally oriented planning and monitoring of the transition period for students with disabilities will be obtained.

#### **4.1. Objectives of research**

The objectives of this research are to understand what significance living in the institution holds for a group of young people with disabilities in the transition period from primary to secondary school, as well as how they perceive decision-making processes about their future. Moreover, to understand how well prepared students with disabilities are for the transition from primary school in the institution to secondary schools. A further objective is to understand how

changes in public policies affect the lives of students with disabilities and the professional practices of staff working with them in the transition period from primary to secondary school.

#### **4.2. Research questions**

In line with the research problem, aim and objectives, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What does the experience of living in an institution signify to students with disabilities?
2. How do students with disabilities in the period of transition from primary to secondary school perceive the decision-making process about their future life?
3. How do changes in public policies affect the lives of students with disabilities?
4. How well are students with disabilities prepared for the transition period from primary to secondary school in the institutional context?
5. How do changes in public policies affect professional practices of the institutional staff members?

#### **4.3. About the Centre for Education**

The Centre for Education is an institution under the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy that implements education according to a special curriculum.

The Centre for Education accommodates 91 children and adolescents with different types of disabilities (intellectual disabilities, attributed behaviour difficulties, endangered mental health) and children with disabilities from poor socio-economic backgrounds and dysfunctional families.

The Centre for Education has a student dormitory for students with disabilities who come from a distant place of residence and are attending secondary school in the city of Zagreb. In their free time, students with disabilities have the option to participate in various leisure activities such as football, volleyball, athletics, bowling, swimming, table tennis, etc. in the Centre for Education. Furthermore, they can participate in national contests with other regular schools and Centres for Education for students with disabilities and are included in competitions with local regular schools (football, bowling, swimming).

The Centre provides other types of psycho-social services for students with disabilities<sup>21</sup> from the local community not enrolled in the Centre, such as individual help in learning, speech therapy, kinesitherapy, movement therapy, music therapy, educational rehabilitation and socio-pedagogical support as prescribed in the Social Welfare Act<sup>22</sup>).

The Centre for Education employs 26 professionals including school professional team<sup>23</sup> (3), special teachers<sup>24</sup>-(14), educators<sup>25</sup> (2) and other specialists- kinesitherapist<sup>26</sup>(2), speech therapists (2), a music therapist (1), an occupational therapist (1) and a sensory therapist (1). They either teach or provide support programmes for children and adolescents with disabilities on daily base.

To protect the privacy of the participants, the name of the institution is changed to The Centre for Education. The real name of the institution and the name used in this thesis are not connected.

Instead of the term *The Centre for Education*, the phrase *The Centre* will be used in the text.

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<sup>21</sup> Ordinance on Minimum Conditions for the Provision of Social Services, Official Gazette, No 40/2014, 66/2015, 56/2020 and 28/2021

<sup>22</sup> Social Welfare Act, Official Gazette, No. 18/2022, 46/2022, 119/2022, 71/2023, 156/2023

<sup>23</sup>consisting of a school psychologist, a school pedagogue and a social worker (in the case for Centre for Education)

<sup>24</sup>University Master in Educational Rehabilitation

<sup>25</sup>University Master in Social Pedagogy

<sup>26</sup> Master's degree in Kinesiology (profession of kinesitherapy).

Kinesitherapy comes from the Greek words kinesis - movement and therapeia – therapy. Kinesitherapy is defined as a scientific discipline through which a series of complex procedures necessary in planning specific kinesitherapy procedures is defined. This means the application of certain modalities in relation to resulting damage, illness and resulting disability. Using targeted kinesitherapy programs, one tries to influence (damage, illness and disability) the changed motor and functional abilities of the individual" (Čiliga, Petrinović Zekan, 2008). Each kinesitherapy program is individualized and depends on the possibilities, needs and health status of the individual. Each program can be created in several parts. It consists of kinesiprevention, kinesicorrection and kinesirehabilitation. By applying kinesiprevention, i.e. using movements, we prevent the occurrence of potential injuries in a healthy population. By applying kinesicorrection with the help of movement, we correct certain dysfunctions that, if not treated in time, can cause permanent changes in the human body. By applying kinesirehabilitation with the help of movement, we treat acute and chronic severe conditions of the locomotor system. (Josipović, 2022).

## 5. METHODOLOGY RATIONALE

This chapter explains the chosen methodology, the conditions for selecting participants and the methods of data collection.

As the objective of this study concerns adolescents with disabilities and their personal experience as an invaluable source of information in the study, the data was collected using a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is an investigation into how members of the group perceive a particular social issue (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001 in Gentles et al., 2015).

The purpose of qualitative research is to systematically describe and interpret issues or phenomena from the point of view of the individual or population being studied, to generate new concepts and theories (Mohajan, Haradhan, 2018) and to achieve the goal of the qualitative tradition of a deep understanding of the particular (Domholdt, 1993 in Mohajan, 2018). Researchers collect and work with non-numerical data and interpret its meaning in order to further understanding of social life through the study of target populations or places (Crossman, 2021).

Qualitative research is based on observing and interpreting persons' perception of various events and recording human perception in natural settings (adapted from Austin and Sutton, 2014). Typically, it includes interviews or discussions that generate non-numeric results (Tümen-Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021). It focuses on words rather than numbers and this type of research observes the world in its natural setting, interpreting situations in order to understand participants' day-to-day life (Walia, 2016). It provides deeper insight into real-world problems (Tenny et al., 2020) of individuals. At the same time, it allows key themes to be identified within the group. It investigates local knowledge and understanding of a given programme, persons' experiences, meanings and relationships, as well as social processes and contextual factors that marginalize a group (Mohajan, 2018). It is possible to say that qualitative research is inductive and the researcher generally explores meanings and insights in a given situation (Strauss & Corbin, 2008; Levitt et al., 2017).

Qualitative research is considered the most appropriate methodology to use in the thesis because qualitative researchers study people in their natural settings, attempting to interpret phenomena in terms of participants' perceptions (Hallberg, 2006) and the primary focus of this research is to analyse specific experiences described by its participants - adolescents with disabilities. The following subsections describe participants of the study.

The primary focus of this qualitative study is to analyse the specific experiences described by its participants (Sladović Franz et al, 2007). In this type of research, comprehensive information is usually collected from a deliberately selected, relatively small number of sources of information/participants, a so-called target sample, which provides the most reliable data. The researcher's task is to help participants express themselves to provide cognitively useful information (Ajduković et al, 2008, Koller Trbović, Žižak, 2012).

In cooperation with the Centre, and in order to achieve the purpose of the research, two key groups of participants were selected: a group of adolescents with disabilities accommodated in the Centre (Sample 1) and a group of professionals working at the Centre (Sample 2). They were chosen as relevant and competent research participants who possess a lot of knowledge about the phenomena that are being explored and can therefore be considered key informants (Ajduković et al, 2008).

Twenty-seven (27) persons participated, nineteen (19) of whom were adolescents with disabilities (attending the final, 8th grade) of primary education and eight (8) professionals working with them. The characteristics of each group of participants are presented in the Chapter 5.2.

The general criteria for the selection of participants in the Sample 1 was that they are in the process of transition from primary to secondary school. As for the Sample 2, the criteria were the daily work with adolescents with disabilities in the transition period. Additional individual case history data of the participants was not used, only the data obtained in interviews. All preparatory actions for the research as well as the research itself were conducted following the Code of Ethics for Children's Research (Ajduković, Keresteš, 2020) and the Guidelines for Conducting Qualitative Research with Children (2020)<sup>27</sup>.

### Sample 1 - adolescents with disabilities

The first group of participants are adolescents with disabilities, living in the institution, the Centre, because of specific situations in their families. A total of nineteen (19) adolescents with disabilities aged fourteen to sixteen (14-16) participated (N=14 M, 5 F). In order to obtain

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<sup>27</sup>National Ethical Committee for Research with Children, 2020; <https://mrosp.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Socijalna%20politika/Obitelj%20i%20djeca/Eti%C4%8Dki%20kodeks%20istra%C5%BEivanja%20s%20djecom%20-%20integrirani%20tekst%20s%20prilozima.pdf>;

data, the study involved adolescents with intellectual disability and adolescents with additional difficulties such as behavioural disorders and emotional problems.

Most participants come from other areas of the country: from Krapina - Zagorje and Brod - Posavina counties which are rural parts of the Republic of Croatia according to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics<sup>28</sup>.

Children and adolescents with disabilities are accommodated based on the document called the Decision of the Form of Accommodation in the Institution of Social Welfare which is made according to the Social Welfare Act. Three types of accommodation are provided: for the duration of the daily school programme, for the duration of the work week, or permanent accommodation. The decision on accommodation is made by the local Centre of Social Welfare because of the problems in the primary family<sup>29</sup> or because the child has a disability (as previously described in the text). This way, children with disabilities are separated from their families and accommodated in the Centre for Education.

In addition, all students with disabilities accommodated in the Centre for Education are provided with the Decision of Appropriate Form of Education made by the Expert Committee appointed by the County Office of Education<sup>30</sup>. In practice, it means they have to be educated according to special curricula and not in their local, regular primary schools in the place where they lived with their families.

Each student with disabilities has assessed their cognitive and socio-competences and have individualized educational plan according to which cognitive skills and social competencies are encouraged and developed. The selected Centre for Education is implementing a programme of primary education under a special curriculum<sup>31</sup> and also provides group activities for education

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<sup>28</sup> <https://dzs.gov.hr/istaknute-teme-162/prostorne-klasifikacije-i-subnacionalne-statistike-2/stupanj-urbanizacije-degurba/453>

<sup>29</sup> As one of the measures to protect the children of endangered development (Social Welfare Act, Official Gazette, No 18/2022, 46/2022, 119/2022, 71/2023, 156/2023)

<sup>30</sup> Appropriate programmes of education, additional educational and rehabilitation programmes determined by the Expert Commission of the local County Office of Education in determining the psychological and physical condition of the child /student with disabilities (Ordinance on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Disabilities, Official Gazette, 24/2015). This type of programme is equivalent to the programme described in The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); part of American legislation that ensures students with a disability are provided with Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) that is tailored to their individual needs. IDEA was previously known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) from 1975 to 1990. In 1990, the United States Congress reauthorized EHA and changed the title to IDEA (Public Law No. 94-142). Overall, the goal of IDEA is to provide children with disabilities the same opportunity for education as those students who do not have a disability

(<http://www.understandingspecialeducation.com/special-education-terms.html>).

<sup>31</sup> based on Ordinance on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Disabilities, Official Gazette, 24/2015

and psychosocial rehabilitation<sup>32</sup> for students with disabilities in permanent and daily programme accommodation. The group activities are based on the Program for Developing Social Competencies which encourages the development of social, practical and creative interests as well as emotional competence in everyday situations.

### Sample 2 - group of professionals

The second group of participants consisted professionals, who are working with the adolescents with disabilities, in the Centre There was in total nine (9) professionals, (N=1 M, 8 F) participating in focus group discussion.

They occupied varied positions: special teachers, educators, kinesitherapies, speech therapist, music therapist, educational specialist - pedagogue. Their positions directly involved working with adolescents with disabilities and being responsible for their development and acquisition of knowledge (as teachers and specialists).

Participant from this sample mostly live in the City of Zagreb and Zagreb County. Chapter 5.3.2. will provide more information about the participants of Sample 2.

## **5.1. Research design**

Data was collected using the method of individual semi-structured interviews with adolescents with disabilities and focus group interviews with professionals.

Semi-structured interviews encourage two-way communication in a relaxed setting as well as a sense of safety and acceptance as the fundamental requirement (Ireland, Holloway, 1996). This type of interview retains a somewhat natural and relaxing atmosphere despite the interview being conducted by researchers (Bognar, 1999). In order to conduct the semi-structured interview, the researcher had a set of basic questions covering the topics of the interview. The questions were developed based on previous conversations of the researcher with individual adolescents with disabilities and their interest in these topics.

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<sup>32</sup> Psychosocial rehabilitation refers to various formats of work and programmes tasked with encouraging and developing cognitive, functional and social skills (Social Welfare Act, Official Gazette, No. 18/2022, 46/2022, 119/2022, 71/2023, 156/2023)

The interviews with adolescents with disabilities covered four areas of their life:

- (1) Life before arrival to an institution (family life, prior educational requirements, leisure time, friends, interests);
- (2) Arrival at the institution (the reasons for the arrival, adjustment to a new way of life, different conditions in the institution, conditions of education, relation to previous school);
- (3) Experience of institutional preparation for transition from primary to secondary schooling;
- (4) Expectations and fears of the future period of life (interest in continuing education, readiness for the new period of life);

These four phases of life were chosen because of changes and transitions that had already taken place, as transition from: one school to another, from primary family to the institution, adaptation and experience of life in the institution, preparation for and experience of transition to secondary school. This enabled a deeper insight into the overall life experience of adolescents with disabilities and what their lives were like with special emphasis on life experience at the Centre for Education and the current transition from primary to secondary school. Protocols for conducting the interviews with adolescents with disabilities can be found in the Appendix.

Focus group was chosen as the preferred method as it exists in a realistic context and allows the investigator to establish a degree of in-depth information from a group of participants in a specific profession (Tümen-Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021).

The main goal of focus groups is to encourage in-depth discussion which explores the participants' values and attitudes to a problem or topic, or to understand and explain the beliefs, and cultures that affect their feelings, attitudes and behaviours (Skoko and Benković, 2009). Focus groups are preferred when behaviours and motivations are more complex than could be revealed by a questionnaire. Through a series of carefully selected questions, focus groups often yield more honest and in-depth information. Speaking of the use of focus groups for content purposes, they are particularly suitable in situations when certain knowledge is impossible to obtain using classical methods.

According to Skoko and Benković (2009), interaction among participants is the key source for analysis and interpretation of the research results. An important factor for the success of focus groups is a qualified moderator who can successfully build discussion from the general to the particular, guide the participants and focus on relevant issues (Canning, 2004).



The data collected by all previously described methods was processed by using the inductive thematic analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis method as a foundational method for qualitative analysis (Holloway and Todres, 2003), and a tool to use across different methods (Boyatzis, 1998), organizes and describes data in detail and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It illustrates the data in great detail and deals with diverse subjects via interpretations (Alhojailan, 2012).

Thematic analysis method is suited for a wide range of research interests and theoretical perspectives. One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility. It can be used to analyse different types of data from secondary sources such as media to transcripts of focus groups or interviews. It works on large or small data sets and can be applied to produce data-driven or theory-driven analyses. It may be a particularly useful method when investigating an under-researched area or working with participants whose views on the topic are not known (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is useful as a basic method because it deals with a range of research questions from people's experiences or interpretations to the representation and construction of particular phenomena in particular contexts. By focusing on the dataset, thematic analysis allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared experiences (Braun and Clark, 2012).

Thematic analysis provides a systematic element to data analysis. It allows the researcher to associate an analysis of the frequency of a theme with one of the whole content (Alhojailan, 2012:10).

Inductive analysis is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame of the researcher's analytic preconceptions. In other words, the codes and themes derive from the content of the data itself. As a result, what is "mapped" by the researcher during analysis closely matches the content of the data.

Themes or patterns in data are identified in an inductive or "bottom-up" way (Frith and Gleeson, 2004) strongly linking the themes to the data (Patton, 1990 in Braun and Clarke, 2006). In contrast, a deductive approach to data coding and analysis is a "top-down" approach.

The researcher approaches the data with a series of concepts, ideas or topics and uses them to code and interpret the data. This means that codes and themes are derived from concepts and ideas the researcher brings to the data. What is "mapped" by the researcher is not necessarily closely linked to the semantic data content (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

Therefore, thematic analysis takes place mainly on a latent or semantic level because it can give intelligible or semantic meanings to data or it can examine latent meanings, assumptions and the ideas behind what is explicitly stated (adapted from Mihanović, 2019, 81). The latent

analysis captures the deeper meanings associated with the interpretation of participants and researchers while semantic analysis refers to the categorization of topics according to the explicit surface meaning of the participants' expressions (Žižak et al, 2012a; 2012b in Mihanović, 2019:81).

## **5.2. Research participants**

Participation in the research was strictly voluntary. Twenty-seven (27) persons participated, nineteen (19) of whom were adolescents with disabilities attending the final, 8th grade) of primary education and eight (8) staff members working with them. The characteristics of each group of participants are presented in the following section.

### 5.2.1. Criteria for the selection of Sample 1- adolescents with disabilities

As the population of students with disabilities is very heterogeneous in terms of the transition period and life experience, a selective sampling model was applied, which includes all subjects which best match the research objectives and can provide the most relevant answers to the research questions (Miller, 2000, Gentles et al, 2015). It is a suitable sample of participants selected on the basis of interest and available opportunities.

The selection of the participants was focused on the common characteristic that they all received a Decision of an Appropriate Form of Education, stating they were to attend primary education according to the special educational curriculum, from the Commission appointed by the local County Office of Education. In addition, all participants received a Decision of the Form of Accommodation in the Centre for Education issued by the local Centre of Social Welfare. A further criterion for selecting adolescents with disabilities was that they attended the final, 8th grade of primary school within the institution.

In accordance with the research timeline, the group of participants consisted of adolescents with disabilities in 8<sup>th</sup> grade in three consecutive school years (2010./2011., 2011./2012. and 2013./2014.) and they were organized in Group 1, Group 2 and Group 3. Depending on the year in which adolescents with disabilities completed primary education in the selected Centre.

The data obtained from all groups was first analysed separately (by groups). However, in Chapter 6, the results are presented collectively for the entire group of adolescents with

disabilities. Initially, the number of potential participants who met the selection criteria was 21 (15 male and 6 female adolescents with disabilities). The expectation was that as many students as possible would participate in interviews in accordance with their interests and the principles of informed consent.

However, 21 adolescents with disabilities wanted to participate in the research and one male participant was not able to due to hospitalization. A female participant could not participate in the interview until the end as she could not control her emotional reactions. Accordingly, 19 interviews with adolescents with disabilities were conducted and included in the analysis.

The heterogeneity of this group of participants - adolescents with disabilities relates to gender, the grade they started at the Centre for Education (classroom teaching / subject teaching) and the number of years they had been there.

### 5.2.2. Characteristics of Sample 1 – a groups of adolescents with disabilities

This section presents common characteristics of the three groups of adolescents with disabilities.

Table 1. shows group characteristics of the group adolescents with disabilities, in terms of gender.

*Table 1. Participants from the group of adolescents with disabilities by gender*

Group	Number of participants	Gender	
		M	F
1	6	3	3
2	7	7	0
3	6	4	2
Total number of participants	19	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>

“Group” refers to a group of adolescents with disabilities from three consecutive school years (SY): SY 2010/2011- group 1; SY 2011/2012- group 2; SY 2012/2013- group 3. “M” stands for male and “F” for female gender.

In the interview, participants were asked to state at which grade they started their education at the Centre. However, it was not initially a criterion for selecting adolescents with disabilities in the main group (Table 2).

Table 2. Additional information on the start of the participants' accommodation in at the Centre

Group	Gender	When they came to the Institution (grade)	The number of years at Centre (at the time of research)
1 (6 participants)	M1	5 <sup>th</sup> grade	four years
	M2	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	six years
	M3	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	three years
	F1	1 <sup>st</sup> grade	eight years
	F2	5 <sup>th</sup> grade	four years
	F3	5 <sup>th</sup> grade	four years
2 (7 participants)	M4	5 <sup>th</sup> grade	four years
	M5	7 <sup>th</sup> grade	two years
	M6	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	six years
	M7	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	six years
	M8	5 <sup>th</sup> grade	four years
	M9	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	three years
	M10	1 <sup>st</sup> grade	eight years
3 (6 participants)	F3	4 <sup>th</sup> grade	five years
	F4	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	six years
	M11	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	three years
	M12	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	seven years
	M13	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	six years
	M14	1 <sup>st</sup> grade	eight years

As seen above, both male (M=14) and female (F=5) students participated, aged fourteen to sixteen (14 to 16), from different classes at the Centre. They started their education at the Centre in different grades. Ten (10) arrived at the Centre in the period of classroom teaching (1st to 4th grade) and nine (9) arrived in the period of subject teaching (5th grade or later) either from their local primary school or other type of special schools.

Table 3. shows the number of years that individual adolescents with disabilities stayed in the Centre before the research was conducted.

*Table 3. Number of years at the Centre*

Number of years at the Centre (at the time of research)	Number of adolescents with disabilities (Total 19)
one year	-
two years	1
three years	3
four years	5
five years	1
six years	5
seven years	1
eight years	3

As seen in Table 3, at the time of conducting the interviews, participants have been at the Centre for Education at least two years (1 participant). Three (3) participants have been there for three years and another three (3) participants for eight (8) years. One (1) participant was there for five (5) years and another participant (1) for seven years (7). Five (5) participants were at the Centre for Education for four (4) years and another five (5) for six (6) years.

### 5.2.3. Criteria for the selection of Sample 2 - professionals

The same principle of selective sampling was applied for the second Sample of participants, the professionals. Sample have common characteristic of daily participation in the education of adolescents with disabilities in Sample 1 and providing them with support in everyday situations.

At the time when research was conducted, the total number of professionals who worked at the Centre was 26. The initial idea was to create two focus groups of professionals working at the Centre. They were informed about the research and invited to participate in focus groups. Only eleven (11) (Male=2, Female= 9) took part.

As a result, the initial plan had to be modified and one focus group with eleven participants was formed. One (1) of the professionals had fallen ill just two days before the start of the focus group reducing the number of participants to ten (10). A heterogeneous group was planned enabling better discussions. One of the other two male professionals initially agreed to participate but excused himself from participating due to unplanned obligations reducing the total number of focus group participants to nine.

The fact that only one out of three male professionals at the Centre was interested or able to participate in the focus group was not according to plan. The third male professional working as class teacher of one of the groups of adolescent participants did not show any interest in participating at all.

The heterogeneity of this group of participants is related to gender, professional profile and position at the Centre, years of overall work experience, years of work experience at the Centre, experience of working with adolescents with disabilities and additional education if applicable. The characteristics of the group of participants 'is presented in subchapter 5.2.2.

#### 5.2.4. Characteristics of research participants - a group of professionals

This group of participants encompassed professionals with similar education but working at different positions at the Centre as seen in Table 4.

*Table 4. Occupations of professionals*

	<b>Total number of participants 9</b>	
<b>Occupation</b>	Special teacher <sup>33</sup>	5
	Educator <sup>34</sup>	2
	Kinesitherapist	1
	Special teacher-religious education	1

The diversity of participants is visible when it comes to their positions at the Centre, gender, years of overall work experience, years of work experience at the Centre, experience of working with adolescents with disabilities and additional education (Table 5).

Demographic data are gathered through the questionnaire that is in the Appendix (6).

*Table 5. Demographic data of professionals participating in the focus group*

<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>TOTAL 9</b>	
	<b>Position</b>	
<b>Occupation</b>	Special teacher- in a school	3
	Rehabilitator/educator – in a group	2
	Social pedagogy /educator- in a group	1
	Kinesitherapist	1

<sup>33</sup> University Master in Educational Rehabilitation

<sup>34</sup> University Master in Social Pedagogy

\*AWD- adolescents with disabilities; under category Gender – M= male; F= female

	Social pedagogue-school education specialist	1
	Special teacher - religious education - in the school	1
<b>Age</b>	23-30	-
	31-40	3
	41-50	3
	51-60	3
	60+	-
<b>Gender</b>	F	8
	M	1
<b>Work experience in the profession</b>	0-5	-
	5-10	1
	10-15	2
	more than 15	6
<b>Years of working with AWD*</b>	1-5	-
	6-10	1
	11-15	3
	16-20	-
	more than 20	5
<b>Additional education</b>	Yes	6
	No	3

Three (3) participants were Special teachers by occupation working at the Centre as teachers. One (1) participant was a Special teacher of religious education working at the Centre as a teacher of religious education.

Two (2) participants were Special teachers working as educators implementing the Program of Psychosocial Rehabilitation, in a group. Another participant (1), university bachelor in social pedagogy by occupation, worked in the group as an educator, implementing the Program of Psychosocial Rehabilitation as well. A Master's degree in Kinesiology (profession of kinesitherapy) by occupation worked with groups or individuals with disabilities. A university bachelor in social pedagogy by occupation, worked as school education specialist.

### 5.3. Method of data collection

The data obtained by the semi-structured interviews with adolescents with disabilities were recorded and transcribed. The focus group interviews were also recorded and transcribed. All obtained data was analysed using the thematic analysis method which is appropriate for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) in qualitative data.

### 5.3.1. Semi-structured interviews

The collection of data and the interviews with adolescents took place over three consecutive school years (2010/2011, 2011/2012, 2012/2013) during the last month of their primary school education (in May of each school year. In the Croatian education system, eighth grade (8<sup>th</sup>) is the final grade of primary school which means adolescents with disabilities are already preparing for transition.

The interviews were conducted by the researcher herself adhering to the principles of research with children and research ethics in qualitative research which is presented in subsection 5.5. in more detail.

Interviews with adolescents with disabilities were conducted in accordance with the Guidelines for Conducting Qualitative Research with Children (2020)<sup>35</sup> granting adolescents independence in decided on participation. Regardless of participation, a letter was sent to parents or guardians of potential participants prior to the interviews explaining the purpose of the research. They confirmed they were informed about participation in the research with their signature (Appendix 1). In addition, the purpose of the research and all relevant information was presented to adolescents in a comprehensible manner prior to the interviews. Full anonymity was guaranteed. After giving verbal consent for participation in the interview, the adolescents read and signed the Consent for Participation in the Research written in clear language they could comprehend with ease (Appendix 2).

Data was collected through individual interviews with 19 adolescents with disabilities according to a pre-designed protocol and a flexible schedule in order to accommodate the student's timetables. In order to maximize the quality of participation, the interview was carried out in clear, easily comprehensible language. A protocol of a semi-structured interview with adolescents with developmental disabilities on the topic of life experience was created. This type of interview is very flexible as it allows the researcher to obtain further information in addition to answers to prepared questions by encouraging interviewees to talk freely about themselves and their life at the institution. The protocol was followed, however, the questions were further clarified and additional explanations were given when necessary.

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<sup>35</sup> National Ethical Committee for Research with the Guidelines for conducting qualitative research with children, 2020;

<https://mrosp.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Socijalna%20politika/Obitelj%20i%20djeca/Eti%C4%8Dki%20kodeks%20istra%C5%BEivanja%20s%20djecom%20-%20integrirani%20tekst%20s%20prilozima.pdf>



Each interview was preceded by an introductory conversation about the purpose and the goal of the research, the manner in which it will be conducted, the roles of participants and researcher, the possibility of withdrawing from participation at any stage, the physical and psychological safety of the participants, protection of participants' privacy and confidentiality of information, and access to the results of research. The schedule and duration of the interviews were not predetermined and adapted to the mood and willingness of adolescents to talk, as well as the sequence of the topics.

The collection of data and the interviews with adolescents took place over three consecutive school years (2010/2011, 2011/2012, 2012/2013) during the last month of their primary school education (in May of each school year. In the Croatian education system, eighth grade (8<sup>th</sup>) is the final grade of primary school which means adolescents with disabilities are already preparing for transition.

The interviews lasted approximately 20 to 40 minutes per student. The spot at which the interviews took place was chosen by the participants. It was a place where they felt most comfortable and free to talk. Adequate conditions for conducting the interviews had to be taken into account. The spot had to be: free from disturbance by other students, quiet and private. Such conditions were ensured and maintained.

The consent for audio recording was obtained and participants were given the opportunity to listen to the tapes and add or correct any information they thought necessary. All audio recorded interviews were transcribed for further analysis.

The interviewer wrote her observations in the form of notes which included descriptions of participants' verbal and non-verbal communication such as: gestures, movements, mannerisms, facial expressions and body language (Mihanović, 2019). The notes were in the form of a reflective journal containing reflections on the interviewer's experience. One of the crucial points of this research in terms of ethics is the fact that all participants were acquainted with the researcher. This is discussed in subchapter 5.5.

### 5.3.2. The focus group

The data obtained from adolescents with disabilities' interviews and predetermined key topics were used as the basis for discussion in the focus group with professionals. The main goals

of the focus group were to collect the professionals' impressions on the adolescents with disabilities' experiences and their critical thoughts on the effect of political changes on their private and as professional lives. Additionally, different ways in which they can support young persons in the transition from primary to secondary school.

The participants came from different professional backgrounds (special educators, educators, kinesiologists, speech therapists, music therapist) and their characteristics are described in more detail in subsection 5.2.3.

As previously described, members of the focus group were professionals working daily with adolescents with disabilities in the Centre making them an invaluable source of information and knowledge about the students.

The focus group interview was to last an hour to an hour and a half and was moderated by the researcher and the assistant moderator. The role of the assistant moderator was to take notes during the focus group interview in order to supplement the data with observations on the participants' nonverbal reactions.

A specific protocol was developed for the purpose of the focus group. An invitation letter was sent to each of the 26 professionals. Three days later, another letter was sent providing additional explanations on the focus group and the cruciality of their involvement in this important research. As the third invitation did not lead to substantial response, potential participants were contacted in person.

The focus group interview was preceded by an introductory discussion with each potential participant about the purpose and the goal of the research, the manner in which it will be conducted, the roles of participants and researcher, the possibility of withdrawing from participation at any stage, the physical and psychological safety of the participants, privacy and confidentiality of information, and access to the results. This ensured obtaining an informed consent for participation.

After personal contact was established, eleven (11) professionals confirmed their participation. The invitation letter and the letter of explanation are found in the Appendix 4 and 5. Adhering to the default settings for the focus group and in accordance with the participants' interest, one group was formed. Due to reasons described reasons the final focus group consisted of nine (9) professionals.

Prior to the focus group interview, a protocol containing the following information was prepared:

1. the data to be collected and recorded and the materials to be prepared for the implementation;

2. suitable time of contacting the desired participants in the focus group interviews; the method of contact and the content of the first information letter for the participants (Appendix 4);
3. the description of the purpose of the research and of conducting the focus group;
4. the questions for the focus group interviews according to the goal and research problem;
5. a reminder to thank people for participating in the research focusing on the confidentiality of the data and the importance of the participants' role in the research.

The focus group interview took place at the end of the research period in May of 2016/2017 school year. Teachers' meeting room was chosen as the venue in agreement with the participants as a comfortable space for talk in with colleagues. The participants were introduced to the moderator/researcher and the assistant moderator immediately before the beginning of the focus group interview. The roles of the moderator and assistant moderator were explained to the participants as well as some fundamental rules of conducting a focus group interview and the aim of group discussion. Participants were allowed to comment or add their rules if needed. In addition, they were informed that the topics of guided group discussion would be based on conclusions obtained from the adolescents with disabilities' anonymous interviews. Finally, they were informed of the aims of collecting their thoughts as professionals working with adolescents and knowing them well. Namely, thoughts on the life of adolescents with disabilities in the institution; on understanding how adolescents are prepared for the transition period from primary to secondary school, and on the effects of policy changes on the life and experiences of adolescents with disabilities.

The focus group interview lasted for 72 minutes. Immediately after, the moderator/researcher and assistant moderator reflected on the interview in conversation, specifically, the manner in which it was conducted, the participants' verbal reactions and body language. Both the focus group interview and the reflexive conversation were audio recorded and transcribed. The transcripts provided the basis for the analysis of the results.

As this research followed the naturalistic approach (Patton, 1990 in Bognar and Štumfol, 1998) and was specifically based on the experiences of adolescents with disabilities, the source data was the data collected from adolescents with disabilities in the form of the transcript of audio recorded interviews.

Obtained themes were primarily grouped into three separate subgroups of adolescents with developmental disabilities, through three common school years, as shown in Table 1. Special attention was paid to the codes that appeared within certain subgroups (1st or 2nd or 3rd).

They were described and explained in the context of the specific life experiences of students with disabilities.

The results of interviews with adolescents with disabilities and focus groups with professionals were interpreted in relation to the relevant literature. Statements of professionals gave (mirror) opinions about the experiences of adolescents with developmental disabilities, in the social context that shapes them, as well as about the specifics of the transitional period from primary to secondary school.

#### 5.4. Principles of data analysis

The data obtained by the semi-structured interviews with adolescents with disabilities was recorded and transcribed. The focus group interviews were also recorded and transcribed. All obtained data was analysed using the thematic analysis method, which is appropriate for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) in qualitative data.

The flexibility of thematic analysis allows the use of inductive and deductive methodology (adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2012; Mihanović, 2019).

In this research, inductive semantic thematic analysis was used, reporting directly what the participants said without looking for other meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Such analysis is not a linear process of moving from one phase to the next. It is a more recursive process where movement across phases is back and forth as needed and it develops over time (Ely et al, 1997 in Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The process of data analysis in this study encompassed six phases as described in Table 6 (Braun and Clarke, 2012):

Table 6: Description of the data analysis

Phase	Description of the process
Familiarization	In this phase, it is important to immerse oneself in the data and the researcher becomes very familiar with it. This is the stage where verbal data is transcribed. The researcher repeatedly reads and re-reads the data. It is important to actively read the entire corpus of data at least once before coding and looking for meaning and patterns. The researcher records initial ideas at this stage but does not start coding.
Generating initial codes	This phase includes creating initial codes for the data. At this stage, it is important for the researcher to systematically code the data corpus. It is important to create as many potential

	codes and themes as possible. After generating initial codes from the data corpus, the data identified under the same code is grouped together.
Searching for themes	This phase focuses on a broader level of themes and involves sorting the various codes into potential themes. It is important to collect all relevant data for each potential topic and create a collection of topics and subtopics.
Reviewing themes- 2 levels	Some themes collapse into other themes whereas some of need to be broken down into smaller components (2 levels of this phase)
Reviewing at the level of the coded data (1st level)	The researcher re-reads all data extracts that fit into each theme to ensure a coherent pattern. This means checking the appropriateness of the topics against the defined codes.
Reviewing at the level of the themes (2nd level)	Consists of considering each topic in relation to the entire corpus of data and creating a thematic map of the data in order to visualize the relationships between topics more easily.
Defining and naming themes	This step captures the essence of each topic and its aspects. The researcher analyses each theme and its individual narrative determining whether some of the themes contain subthemes or not and creating clear definitions and names for each topic.
Writing up	This is the stage when the final analysis and writing of the report is done. Consideration is given to providing sufficient evidence for each topic using vivid examples from the data.

Inductive thematic analysis is often experiential in its orientation and theoretical framework assuming a knowable world and “giving voice” to experiences and meanings of that world, which emerge from the analysed data as reported in the data (adapted according to Braun and Clarke, 2012).

It is important to emphasise that qualitative research outcomes are, above all, practical, real, everyday people's problems, not the theoretical problems of a particular science (Mesec, 1998).

The main interest behind this research were precisely the real, everyday problems of adolescents with disabilities. The final analysis of the data and writing up the interpretation of the results provide a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of their stories, in and across themes.

The analysis makes an argument in relation to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The details are presented in Chapter 7.

## 5.5. Research ethics

The specifics of qualitative methodology must be considered especially in research with children. “Resolving ethical issues is an important part of planning and organizing the research, the implementation of research methods and procedures, and the interpretation and publication of results” (the Guidelines for Conducting Qualitative Research with Children, 2020:1).

As all the participants were aged 14 or older, they were allowed to give independent written or oral consent to participate in the research according to the Code of Ethics for Research with Children (Section 3). Following the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989), an emphasis has been put on the importance of respecting the child’s autonomy.

Namely, the right of the child to be informed about the research, respecting the child’s opinion and their right to withdraw from participation at any time. As a result, prior to giving consent for participation, the students were informed about the purpose and manner of conducting the research and forms of their participation. They were guaranteed data protection and anonymity, the possibilities of positive outcomes were explained to them, and the option of withdrawal from participation at any time was given.

Parents or guardians of adolescents with disabilities who participated in the study had been informed in writing about the purpose, progress, and the manner of conducting the research prior to the beginning of the research. They confirmed they understood the information with their signature. They, too, were guaranteed their children’s data will be handled securely and anonymously.

All the professionals who participated in the study were informed in advance of the purpose, process and method of conducting the research and the focus group interview. They were guaranteed privacy of data and anonymity as well as the option of withdrawal from participation at any time. They gave their consent to participate in written form (signed consent). However, as some were apprehensive about providing their signature, they were given all the information orally and consented verbally.

Sharing and observing personal experiences characteristic of qualitative research puts the researcher and the participant in direct interaction and can affect research objectivity (the Guidelines for Conducting Qualitative Research with children (2020:1). As all participants knew the researcher personally, albeit in different roles, the impact such familiarity has on them must be taken into account when interpreting and presenting data. The group of adolescents with disabilities knew the researcher as their special teacher. The researcher was

very aware of the influence her authority as an adult has on adolescents with disabilities and took special steps to enable children to openly express their opinions and experiences without pressure.

The researcher constantly maintained a neutral position by reminding the participants of anonymity and confidentiality of data and the possibility of withdrawing from the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable.

The professionals participating in the focus group knew the researcher as a colleague. As data was collected in a group setting, special emphasis was placed on the importance of confidentiality of the information placed forward in the interview. The question of honesty in their answers can be raised. However, the familiarity with the researcher might have led to greater trust and a feeling of security when giving honest answers to personal and difficult questions.

The research was conducted in the institution under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy (at the time of carrying out the research called the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy), therefore, it was necessary for the researcher to obtain permission from the principal of the Centre. Permission was given to conduct research and use the data for the purpose of writing a doctoral thesis and publishing scientific articles. The data was processed in units without specifying participants' personal details and the original interview recordings and their transcripts are not available to anyone except the researcher.

In all instances of unexpected events such as changes in health, behaviour or emotional state, anxiety, or request for withdrawal from participation in the interviews with adolescents, the interviews were terminated. For example, when an adolescent with disabilities got nervous and did not want to participate in the interview, the researcher firstly tried to calm the participant and talk to them in order to eliminate the cause of nervousness and anxiety if possible.

If not the researcher proposed to terminate the interview and the adolescent with disabilities could then independently decide if they wanted to continue later, on a different day or not at all. The participant was given the choice to repeat the interview at a time and place that suited them best or withdraw from participation. In case of strong agitation that persisted, the researcher was ready to stop the interview and focus on helping the adolescent. Support of a psychologist and psychotherapist was given as needed and in accordance with the Guidelines for Conducting Qualitative Research with Children (2020:6).

If any information came to the researcher's knowledge of the events that were endangering the welfare of a child, they were under obligation to report such events to the appropriate authorities or institutions.

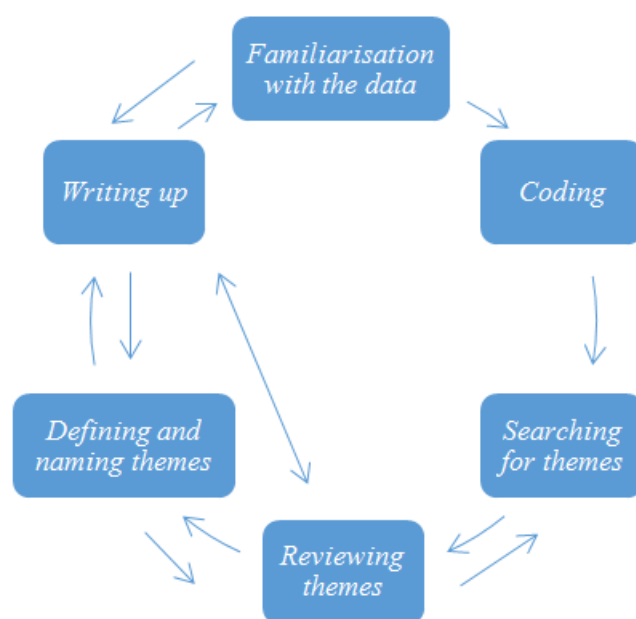
In conclusion, the research was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Code of Ethics of the Department for Ethics in Science and Higher Education which primarily refers to abiding by the international and national laws and regulations connected with the protection of the interviewees as well as guaranteeing participants' anonymity and the confidentiality of information.



## 6. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

This chapter will present the results of the course of qualitative analysis of data collected through individual semi-structured interviews with students with disabilities, who were selected as participants (Sample 1) and the data collected by a focus group with professionals (Sample 2), who are working with adolescents with disabilities.

Collected data were analysed through a qualitative analysis as described in subchapter 5.4. During analysis, all six steps were followed following the thematic analysis process, which is shown in the schematic view (Braun and Clarke, 2006) (Scheme 1).



Scheme 1- course of thematic analysis

The categories and topics obtained respect the perception of the life experience of students with disabilities, depending on the period of life of the adolescent with disabilities.

As previously explained it was planned that the interviews with adolescents with disabilities would cover four areas of their life (life before arrival in an institution, arrival in an institution, experience of institutional preparation for transition from primary to secondary schooling and expectations and fears in the future period of life). During the interviews, adolescents with disabilities in their statements, often associated two of the periods - the period of arrival at the Centre with the period of education/stay at the Centre and the period of

experience of institutional preparation for transition from primary to secondary schooling with the period of expectations and fears in the future period of life.

Since the data indicated this, in data processing and analysis, only three periods are shown- life before arrival in the Centre, period of life in the Centre and period of life after completing their education at the Centre.

### **6.1. Analysis of interviews with adolescents with disabilities**

The names of the themes and sub-themes contain reflections of adolescents with disabilities on what is important for them about their life experience within three different periods of life. Due to the large number of codes, a complete table with results is presented in the Appendix 7.

It should be noted important issues for the sake of clarity of the presentation of the results, that some questions caused discomfort and a sense of insecurity among some participants. Because of this, their answers are often very short and can seem confusing without context.

Precisely for the sake of additional understanding of their statements, visible gestures or actions that the participant consciously/unconsciously did at the time of answering the question, are described in parentheses, as well as an explanation of the asked question. The findings of the qualitative thematic analysis will be presented by the specific period of life of adolescents with disabilities and according to the set of research questions.

The following Table 7 presents the example for the course and steps of qualitative analysis of the interviews with adolescents with disabilities, for covered areas of their life - life before arrival in the Centre.

Table 7. - Example for the steps of qualitative analysis of the interviews with adolescents with disabilities - Period of life before arrival in the Centre

PERIOD	STATEMENTS OF PARTICIPANTS	CODES	SUB - THEMES	THEMES
LIFE BEFORE ARRIVAL IN THE CENTRE	1. „ Yes."... (then he lived with his dad) (M13) 2. “Mom died much earlier, in the war.” (M13) 3. "No, she died in the war, I told you myself." (M13) 1. "With dad... Just ...."(M7) 2. "Well, my mother died in 2005, on 25.5. And so. My grandmother died before my mother, and I never even met my grandfather." (M7) 3. No."...(he has no brother or sister) (M7) 4. "Yes."...(dad takes care of him) (M7)	<b>LIFE WITH FATHER</b>	<b>LIFE IN A SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY</b>	<b>FAMILY CONTEXT</b>
	1.“ Yes"...(Mom took him to school and back home) (M12)	<b>LIFE WITH THE FAMILY</b>	<b>LIFE WITH THE PRIMARY FAMILY</b>	
	1. "...like mom..."(M11) 2. "Yes"...(when he changed schools, he lived with his aunt, who took him from the children's home)(M11) 3." And when I don't have parents... Yes. ... Yes. At the age of two."(M11) 4. "No. I call her mom." (M11)	<b>LIFE WITH A FOSTER AUNT</b>	<b>LIFE IN A FOSTER FAMILY</b>	
	1. “When the mother realized that she could not live without her children, she returned to my father.” (F4) 2. "They came to me every month. Mom, dad and my two brothers". (F4) 3. "Well, I was in that community with some people and from them I went to my home and school and so on." (F4)	<b>LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY FOR CHILDREN</b>	<b>LIFE IN A FOSTER FAMILY</b>	
	1. “When the mother realized that she could not do without the children, she returned to my father.”(F4)	<b>MOM'S BEHAVIOUR MODEL</b>	<b>MOM'S BEHAVIOR MODEL</b>	<b>FAMILY CONTEXT</b>

LIFE BEFORE ARRIVAL IN THE CENTRE	1. "Yes" ..(his friends helped him) 2. "What's his name...let me remember. One friend has a tattoo, one of a tail and one of a dragon." (M13)	<b>POSITIVE EXPERIENCE OF ASSOCIATION WITH FRIENDS IN THE MAINSTREME EDUCATION</b>	<b>POSITIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS</b>
	1. "Good friends" (in the former school). 2. "There" (in the previous school were better friends) (M14) 3. "So so ... There we have a better hall than here. Big, wide". (M14) 4. "They practised" .... "all kinds of things." ... 5. "That. They played..." (M14)	<b>POSITIVE EXPERIENCE OF ASSOCIATION WITH FRIENDS IN THE MAINSTREME EDUCATION SYSTEM</b>	<b>POSITIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS</b>
	1. "Well, I had a good friend, it was hard for me to study anyway." (M7) 2. ",,..."(silence first)...I did." (had friends in class). 3. "Nino..... and this... one Rabbit... that's what we call him..." 4. "Well, they finished school... No, but they will finish now." 5. "Well...fuse...(laughs).." 6. "A-a."...friends did not cause problems. (M10)  1. "Yes." (he had friends in his old school.) 2. "Normal... I had a couple of the best." (M8) 4. "Yes!" (M6) 3. "Yes!"..(he had friends and participated in some activities) (M5)	<b>POSITIVE EXPERIENCE OF ASSOCIATION WITH FRIENDS IN THE MAINSTREAM EDUCATION SYSTEM</b>	<b>POSITIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS</b>
	1. "I did." ... "Tina" (F4) 2. "We only hung out at school." (F4) 3. "I was sitting with a girl Valentina.", ... 4. "No" ... (she didn't hang out with her)(F4)	<b>REMEMBERING FRIENDS FROM THE REGULAR EDUCATION SYSTEM</b>	<b>POSITIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS</b>

LIFE BEFORE ARRIVAL IN THE CENTRE	1. "I had."...friends in old school (M12) 2. "They are"....they were good friends (M12) 3. "Žarko, Ivan and Monika"....he remembers the names of his friends (M12)	<b>REMEMBERING FRIENDS FROM THE MAINSTREME EDUCATION SYSTEM</b>	<b>POSITIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS</b>
	1. "No."...(he is not sorry for leaving his friends) (M12) 2. "I rarely, rarely see them now." (M12)	<b>LOST CONTACT WITH FRIENDS FROM THE MAINSTREME EDUCATION SYSTEM</b>	<b>POSITIVE PEER RELATIONSHIPS</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS</b>
	1. "In my class when I was first, there were about four, five of us." (M12)	<b>SMALL CLASS</b>	<b>DIFFERENCE IN CLASS SIZE</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE FROM PREVIOUS SCHOOL</b>
	1. "Many" ..(students in the class at the old school) (M13) 2. "A boy. " (was more) (M13) 3. "Yes."...he also had a lot of friends there (M13). 4. "Okay. We kind of joked better, we joked a little. One got lost when we put him in the bathtub." (M13)	<b>LARGER CLASS</b>	<b>DIFFERENCE IN CLASS SIZE</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE FROM PREVIOUS SCHOOL</b>
	Well, we were... well, there were about twenty of us." (F4) "Yes."...there were a lot of students ...(F4) "Boys." ..there were more..(F4)	<b>LARGER CLASS</b>	<b>DIFFERENCE IN CLASS SIZE</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE FROM PREVIOUS SCHOOL</b>
	(In his old school ..)" In S*?...No.." (he didn't go home every day) "I slept there too." (M7)	<b>RELATION TO PAST EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION</b>	<b>SCHOOL</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE FROM PREVIOUS SCHOOL</b>
	1. At home "I have... sisters and brothers..." There are six more at home. Four girls, four boys." 2. The oldest is "Brother..." and he is "24", and the youngest sister is "er.....nine". (M4)	<b>LIFE WITH MOTHER, FATHER, THREE SISTERS AND BROTHER</b>	<b>LIFE IN A MULTIPLE FAMILY</b>	<b>FAMILY CONTEXT</b>
	2. "I have mom, dad, three sisters and one brother." 3. "I" (he is the oldest.) 4. "Kristijan, Mario... Kristina, mmm...this....Marina and Lucija..." 5. "Yes." (he is the oldest.)		<b>LIFE IN A MULTIPLE FAMILY</b>	<b>FAMILY CONTEXT</b>

	6. "Yes" (has another brother, mom and dad and three sisters at home.)(M10)	<b>LIFE WITH MOTHER, FATHER, THREE SISTERS AND BROTHER</b>		
<b>LIFE BEFORE ARRIVAL IN THE CENTER</b>	1. (In the old school) ..."Yes!" ( he went home every day) 2. "When I went every day."...( home) 3. "Yes!"..( It was nicer for him then) (M4)	<b>DAILY CONTACT WITH THE FAMILY</b>	<b>POSITIVE EMOTIONS TOWARD FAMILY</b>	<b>FAMILY CONTEXT</b>
	1. (At home then it looked) "Good....Different..." (than today) (M4) 2. "Yes..."(relations in the family were good before leaving) (M4)	<b>GOOD FAMILY RELATIONS</b>	<b>POSITIVE EMOTIONS TOWARD FAMILY</b>	<b>FAMILY CONTEXT</b>
	1. "I was fighting... With female teachers...Yes." 2. "And he hit the teacher with a chair." 3. "She gave me an unjustified."  4. "Yes... What we sang, we had music, and then... and the teacher didn't want to let me and my friend sing, and we sang folk songs, and then she gave me an unjustified one, I was with a chair (M4)	<b>AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS THE TEACHER</b>  <b>NEGATIVE MEMORY OF TEACHERS</b>	<b>BEHAVIOUR IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT</b>  <b>TEACHER</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE FROM PREVIOUS SCHOOL</b>
	1. "Yes".. (then he was nervous.) 2. "Well, he ran away from class and so on." (M10)	<b>RUNNING AWAY FROM LESSONS</b>	<b>BEHAVIOUR IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE FROM PREVIOUS SCHOOL</b>

### 6.1.1. Perceptions of life experience of adolescents with disabilities in the period of life before coming to the Centre

The themes that were identified are based on the statements of adolescents with disabilities through inductive thematic analysis for the period before coming to the Centre. In the text that follows, key topics are presented in more detail, which, in their meaning, gives us useful information for answering the research questions. A complete table of themes, sub-themes and codes can be found in the Appendix 7.

#### 6.1.1.1. The first theme is FAMILY CONTEXT

This theme represents the structure and relationships between family members and provides information about the functioning and values within the family of the research participants.

*Table 8: Theme *Quality of experience in the family and family dynamics* with sub-themes*

FAMILY CONTEXT	QUALITY OF EXPERIENCE IN THE FAMILY AND FAMILY DYNAMICS
	RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRIMARY FAMILY

#### QUALITY OF EXPERIENCE IN THE FAMILY AND FAMILY DYNAMICS

Sub-theme *Quality of experience in the family and family dynamics* in multi-layered shows how the participants described different types and structures of family life that they had, before coming to the Centre. In their answers, all participants wanted to talk about general settings and information about their families. Occasionally during the conversation, there were situations in which they felt uncomfortable talking about some topic or they avoided answering such questions. In such situations, they reacted specifically with body language or an unconscious reaction, regardless of the verbal response, and gave additional significance to the content they spoke. This reaction was taken into account in the analysis and descriptively placed in parentheses.

By implying the term "family", the participants expressed different understandings and characteristics of their families. Here it must be emphasized that most participants go to their homes/families on weekends (and holidays) and some are placed in foster families, where they also go on weekends or holidays.

A smaller number of participants, due to the decision of the court or the local Centre for Social Welfare, stays in the Centre during the weekend and occasionally go to their homes or foster parents according to the schedule.

Those statements indicate importance of family and relationships between family members for adolescents with disabilities. They pointed out the importance of family life in the period before coming to the Centre.

Guided by such a premise, 12 participants described their family as typical primary families, *living with a mother and father* or living together with an extended family, with more siblings - *life with a mother, father, sister and brothers*:

*"Brother and sister... Six and a half....Now, my brother will go to the first grade in the fall, and my sister is now in the fourth grade....Ah" (M3);*

*"I have... sisters and brothers...There are six more at home. Four girls, four boys...". (The oldest is )"Brother..." ... 24", (and the youngest sister is) "er.....nine". (M4);*

For other participants family life is connected with their extended family - *life with a mother, father, sisters, brother-in-law and niece*: *"Mom, dad, two sisters and a brother-in-law...and a niece."... "Yes."(...one sister got married..)... "The other one is not, she is still going to school...only first grade." (F2)..."Mom, dad, aunt, another sister and niece and brother-in-law." (F2).*

One of the participants lived only with his father, the father was his only family because of life circumstances:

*"With dad...Just..." ... "Well, my mom died in 2005, on May 25..and so...My grandmother died before my mother, and I never met my grandfather." ... "No" ..(he has no brother or sister) ... "Yes" ...(dad takes care of him) (M7)*

The participants did not always answer precisely the question of who they live with at home (mostly they meant the primary family) but in their answers always mentioned some siblings that left the family home, to live somewhere else:



*"Sister, brother.... Sister with her boyfriend... brother lives with a girl..."...they moved away" ... (M3)*

*... "Two brothers and one sister...I have more, but they all don't live in the apartment anymore.. ..which ....one sister moved... one brother and ....five...." (M3)*

One participant gives importance to pointing out that her sister is living separately with another family, which shows the situations and relationships among family members:

*"I have a sister...She is with another dad....Yes..." .." What?... Well, they have separated already....Mom got married twice...Yes.....Sister...25, 26.....sister is a daughter from my mother's first marriage....I come to her house and that". (M2)*

The participants often do not experience a big change when family members leave the family home because most of siblings stay somewhere close to the family:

*"At the boyfriend's place."..(younger sister lives).. "Oh no, I see her every day....I see her more than before... if I don't see her.... And what do I need to go to her, five...five minutes... Aha.... And another sister left also...Older... a lot..." (he has a lot of sisters) (M3)*

The family lifestyle is not always the best organised and the participants often moved with their families:

*"We lived somewhere once, then we moved to Rudeš before I came there. And then when I went to this school, I changed my address again and now we are at this new one...".. "Before when I was... where we were before... there were stairs, then I know I fell, so it had to change.... To Zagrebačka, Prečko..." (F2)*

Because of specific family situations, in some cases participant lived for a while with his grandparents or some of the siblings - family members - brother stayed with his grandmother for a while;

*"Yes, I was in Bosnia..., why?" ... "Where was I... I was born in Zagreb, maybe I was there for a year or two... I was in Bosnia for two years..... Well, that's my grandmother in Bosnia...what...Yes ..." (he would stay with his grandmother all summer).... My brother was with my grandmother in Bosnia" (M3)*

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRIMARY FAMILY

The sub-theme *Relationship with the Primary Family* presents the impact of the relationship between family members on adolescents with disabilities, and how adolescents experience relationships among their family members. For some participants, it is visible through the statements of a portion of the atmosphere at home and perception of life within the family as well as the experience of some new circumstances within the family, to which adolescents give importance (relocation of a family member or even death of a family member).

Most adolescents with disabilities in their statements described that they had good family relations, when they lived in their families, before coming to the Centre, and that included good *relations between family members*;

"Yes."...(he agrees with his sister....His brother is) "Good!...In everything!...In everything (quietly bowed head)" (M2).

Here it must be noted again that the final statements did not always agree with the intonation or body language of the participants at the time of the interview. Because of that some reactions are noted in brackets or it is described what kind of question was asked.

One participant compared the situation in the family now and before going to the Centre: "Good... different... than today." (M4)...

Some participants pointed out examples of good relationships between family members rather show how the participants behaved before coming to the Centre;

"No...ccc..nothing..(quietly)"... "And why would I argue with the Old lady <sup>36</sup>. Well, I don't even argue with the old man <sup>37</sup>, what's the point of arguing...fuck... maybe...what... I raise my voice a little, but I immediately lower it..."(M3)

As for family relationships, a lot of emotions were included in the statements, and the manner and style of the answers emphasized that family relationships should be viewed as having no problems at home. These codes mainly refer to two participants for whom it was very important that the relationships in their families be presented in this way:

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<sup>36</sup>Old lady- stara in Croatian, meaning mother (further in the text: Old lady)

<sup>37</sup> Old man - stari in Croatian, meaning father (further in the text: Old man)

*"Noooo! ... What kind of problems are there any way!? Fuck! No one fights, I come home, eat, go out, come home again, I tell the old lady 'I'm going fishing', and I go fishing... I can do it well... I've been going since I was ten... And what?! And every time they know where I am and what I am and what, he brings me food there at Bager, at the lake, in the summer they have barbecues and what, what kind of problems are there...is it?" (M3)*

One of the participants pointed out several times during the interview that the relations between family members are normal and that they talk about everything - *everything is agreed upon at home*; „*The final word?... what about this? ...they agree with each other...No! (nods his head).. “...there is no one who has the final word in the family... Well, they have to... they agree... if it works, it works, if it doesn't work, then they will agree later... Of course, they agree...What?... But the Old man says "I will buy a car", the Old lady says "Buy". ... it happens again....what if the father doesn't like that car...she buys another one that is better and cheaper. What, if the Old man buys this Hyundai Sonata, '95, and the Old lady agrees. And that's all..." (M3)*

The participants mostly stated that before coming to the Centre, they had *daily contact with the family*: *“In the old school ...when I went home every day (looking down) ...” (M4)...*

The participant additionally reacted through non-verbal unconscious behaviour (looking down at his hands) to the question of whether he used to go home every day.

Also, the possibility of going home is associated with better relations in the family before coming to the Centre: *“Relations in the family were good before leaving.” (M4)*

As a consequence of changed relations and in contrast to the aforementioned statements, there were certain unfavourable family circumstances due to which the participants could not go home. These codes are mainly related to one participant and her specific family situation, for which she was moved to different forms of accommodation and residential communities; *“That's what he decided ...judge.... nobody didn't ask me anything, but the judge said that I had to ...to be there (in the Centre) because the situation at home was...(ccc)...they had a couple of shows with me and then I got used to that...” (F4)*

Due to such reasons, there are also specific conditions for visitation of her parents after separation;

*„Placed with another family because mom was placed in a safe house. Dad beat Mom.“*

*"Mom returned to dad, then they...they sent that piece of paper to the Court ..that I can go on weekends and for holidays... My parents asked for the Court decision that I can be allowed to come home. And then they let us go."(F4) (Her family came to visit every month, at first mom and dad separately.)*

Some statements indicate difficulties in relationship among family members or that the role of parents is not entirely positive. Speciality is a case when participants described Mom's behaviour model which is very specific: *"When the mother realized that she could not do without the children, she returned to father." (F4)*

Various bad models of behaviour are present in the family, and the behaviour of the parents also affects other family members, resulting in bad behaviour in general. For example, the father gets angry easily, is ready to hit the other in situations of argument or becomes aggressive when he feels powerless, that he cannot help his child:

*"Well, f\*," says the Old man, "I'm standing outside, smoking a cigarette, and you were there in the hall...and the door was closed up, I can hear you..." They weren't allowed to numb it, to give me an injection, or anything, so they did it without anaesthesia (na živo in Croatian) ... because he said there was too much blood... And it was the same... And what, the Old man came, what are you doing, and punch him off. In the end, he apologized to him, but they still went to drink... (laughs). What, that's what he told me, is... what do I know... (laughing)" (M3)*

It can be assumed that such a model of behaviour contributes to similar inappropriate and undesirable behaviour, as adolescents with disabilities report experiences involving similar elements outside the primary family- *behaviour at his grandmother's house, which caused him to be injured:*

*"Yes, why would I hide that today?!...And what... I've put the barbed wire in my mouth ... the guy pulled it ... and the tongue came off... Yeah! And what... the barbed wire in my mouth and tongue is gone....I still have a scar.....) Yes, I don't have half of my tongue. I still have a scar... Yes!... Aha." (M3)*

Inappropriate behaviour became his daily routine in having fun with peers:

*"What was I doing there? So there...I have no idea...what...that's where I went to get ready, over there...they took that canister, I remember that it's...almost my whole childhood...that's...What took that canister for oil, the one with five litres went up to the roof*

*and then we went down. The roof is like that (he shows with his hands the slope of the roof)...it goes down and then...this flat and below, what, maybe half a meter, a meter of high nettles... We used to jump there..."..." Yes...I had no idea, so I did. And what, they climbed up on the house... and what... that was... they put... that was... I wasn't there all day,.. f\*... I was hiding....And better...like that...(laughs)...That's how I was...it is!"(M3)*

When mentioning possible problems at home or among family members, participants often deny such possibilities, showing very strong emotions and a raised voice, shifting the responsibility to, and blaming a social worker for lies in court:

*"There's no problem...yeah...what now social worker....how won't someone crack...How won't old man (father) get pissed off when they lie...yeah!...What?! When she lies!..." (M3)*

Participants sometimes mentioned that they have a good relationship with other members of the family (grandmother): *"Often... Every day!" ..he goes to his grandmother's house (M2). "Nothing, I'm sitting...NO"... (he doesn't help Grandma with anything) "She's not sick!...Yes!.." (she can do anything by herself) (M2).*

Some of the participants in their statements connected their lives with primary families with some specific situations that were important to them and to which they reacted emotionally, such as the case related to a sister's marriage:

*"Sister...A\*" ... (is the oldest)... "He was the first brother, he died when my mother was in... it doesn't matter, I forgot... then he died, so I guess she was born... I don't know what happened, he died. And then my mother gave birth to my sister, then me, and then this youngest sister... Elma "... "There were three of us and then my sister got married and then ... with her brother-in-law she had her child S\*." (F2)*

They express a similar attitude towards the death of a family member, which does not have too much emotional significance as an event, but as a time frame and landmark for some other specific events that will come or follow:

*"And then we went, then the brother of my mum called ... in fact, from my mom, her mom's brother, called my mom and said as if grandma had died... then mom went... there she was a month and then she died in the hospital... then I cried because I loved my grandmother... Then I cried for her. Me, sister and then dad then we left ... and we buried her and then my sister after ... Grandma died when they buried her and then my sister got married..." (F2)*

"Grandfather died.....Grandpa already died... my mom's dad already died when she was little... she was... 10... 15 years old, 16, then she died. And what, my grandfather is here in Z\*... in Z\*." (M3)

"He was the first brother, he died, when my mother was in... it doesn't matter, I forgot... then he died, so I guess he was born... I don't know what happened, he died. And then my mother gave birth to my sister, then I, and then this youngest sister... E\*- " (F2)

#### 6.1.1.2. The second theme is *EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS*

The theme *Peer relationships* represents the experiences of adolescents with disabilities, in the period before coming to the Centre, which largely depends on the relationship of peers towards students with disabilities. The given names of sub-themes and codes in most cases carry the specific context of the spoken quotes, phrases or even some described gestures of the participants, named as such in the analysis.

Table 9: Theme *Experience with peers* with sub-themes

<b>EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS</b>	NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS
	POSITIVE EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS
	<i>LOST CONTACT WITH FRIENDS</i>

Starting from the perspective of Peer relationships, the content of participants' statements varies from short, positive and/or negatively emotional sentences that express satisfaction or dissatisfaction, to non-verbal signs whose meanings complement and connect with spoken content. Within this sub-theme, the participants (adolescents with disabilities) pointed out some unpleasant experiences they had with their peers in the regular education system, that is, in the school they attended before the Centre. With body language and specific short verbal responses, participants express a general discomfort due to the conversation on a specific topic. Some also express a feeling of anger at the same time and speak in a slightly raised tone when answering questions during the interviews.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS

The sub-theme shows peers' attitudes towards the participants and the particularities of the transition to education in a special school.

Some of the male participants pointed out that in the regular school that they went to, before coming to the Centre, there were situations in which peers in higher classes made fun (mock) of them (children with disabilities) because of the wrong pronunciation; *"That one... there one." ... (the student mocked him every time) ... "Yes!...that student always knew everything.... He was better than all of us....Mah...They bothered me, and so on...They made fun of me because I didn't know how to say "r". .. That upset me..." (M6)*

Sometimes peers mock students with disabilities just because they are different: *... "That I don't know anything ...and something like that." (In his old school, the children used to make fun of him) "...Yes!" ...the children mocked him.... "Aaa...Seventh and eighth grades...Yes!"... those older students mocked him the most... (M9)*

There was also frequent *mocking of peers because of bad marks at school:*

*"Well, some of them make fun of me... in the beginning, they didn't, but towards the end they were mocking. Because of grades." (M8)*

Students with disabilities were in general the source of other students' jokes: *...You don't know anything... like that." ... "Yes!" ...Aaa...Seventh and eighth grades."... (mocked him the most) ... "Yes!" ... (older students mocked him) (M9)*

It was not rare to find evidence of verbal and physical abuse of peers in higher grades toward students with disabilities, about which the participants did not talk very easily: *"Everything was great from the first grade until the seventh grade, then in the seventh grade, new ones came, then they said... blah blah blah, then they started challenging me all the time... Then they knew how to follow me home and follow me wherever I went.." (M5)*

Because of such attitudes towards students with disabilities, participants had fewer friends in the regular school: *"...And I had a few pieces, but..." "... "It was my neighbour and two other guys" .... "I had some friends" ..(M9).*



Female participants also didn't have so many friends in the regular school: *"I did."...(she had a friend)...her name was "Tina... we only hung out at school....I was sitting with a girl Valentina.",....." No!"(but she didn't hang out with her) (F4)*

The attitude of peers from the regular education system towards education in special schools had an impact on the perception of success and abilities that participants about themselves: *"Bad...everyone thinks I'm not good company, others were better...".. "They didn't!"... (ask him anything about the new school)... "I didn't!"... (say anything to my friends about a new school)... "No!"...(he doesn't talk about the special school with his friends)..." N...Well, they knew!"...(why he went to another school). (M2)*

The peers he considered friends, from regular school, had some comments about him (the participant) going to another, special school: *"...And they didn't (say) anything, they made fun of me... and nothing..."... (when he said to others that he was going to another school).... (M6) They didn't. (quietly).... I said (to them) that I'm going to school in Samobor and come (home) on weekends."(M9)...*

### POSITIVE EXPERIENCE WITH PEERS

This sub-theme is associated to a few friends from the regular education system, the experience of association with friends from the neighbourhood and the positive experience of association with friends in the regular education system.

Unlike the previous sub-topic, the participants' express association and positive relationships with peers through their experience from the regular education system;

*"... Well, I had a good friend, it was difficult for me to study and so on." (M7)*

*"I had friends in old school....In my class when I was first, there were about four, five of us." (M12)*

*"In my previous "small school" I had good friends...they were better friends." (M11)*

The participants happily stated that during the periods when they are at home, they hang out with friends from the neighbourhood: *"With the neighbour...They come...Yes"...(she hangs out when she is at home) (F3)*



Although they are educated in another school, a special institution, the participants expressed positive experiences of association with friends in the regular education system and satisfaction with the fact that they occasionally see their friends from regular school, whom they still consider friends: *"Yes...I see"..., (a friend from the regular system).... "On Saturdays."...(they hang out)... "No."...(don't know in what school my friends go to now)... "Let's go rollerblading...yes"...(around the neighbourhood).... Still.... A lot...." (she has friends)... "From school... ever since Petra."... (they know each other).... "I meet."...(a friend from regular school) ... "He came home."...(to play).... "Yes."...(they are still friends) (F3).*

### LOST CONTACT WITH FRIENDS

Sub-themes *Lost contact with friends* connect memories of hanging out with friends from the previous school and the fact that they lost some friends.

Adolescents with disabilities remember friends from the regular education system;

*"I had. "...friends in the old school... "They...were my good friends"... "Žarko, Ivan and Monika"...( the names of his friends) (M12)*

*"Well, I had a good friend, it was hard for me to study anyway."...(in his old school) (M7)*

*"There..."(were better friends)..." No reason, so (tak in Croatian) ... We have a better hall than this one... Big, wide.... A little bit of everything.." (they practised all kinds of sports in that hall)... "Yes...we played with the ball...played board game (graničar in Croatian)"... "Yes"...(he enjoys playing) (M14).*

Unfortunately, it can be noticed a widespread pattern that students with disabilities lose contact with friends from the regular school system, and they don't hang out with them anymore: *"No! ( somewhat angry and determined)"...( he answers the question that he is not sorry for leaving his friends) ... "I rarely, see them now."... "Not anymore."... (M12)*

The participants still have some information about friends from their old regular school, that makes them feel happy, pointing out the information that some of their friends no longer want to go to school:

“ Mario....Yes..“(sees a friend from regular elementary school).... "And he...he...doesn't go anymore...Well, he doesn't... It's not...but he doesn't feel like going...just like that..." (M1).

### 6.1.1.3. The third theme is *EXPERIENCE FROM PREVIOUS SCHOOL*

This topic shows the various factors that the participants highlighted during the interviews, which influenced the experience and perception of education in the previous school, before coming to the Centre. The obtained sub-themes were divided according to the specific impact they left on the participants but are consequently highly interconnected.

Table 10. Theme *EXPERIENCE FROM PREVIOUS SCHOOL* with sub-themes

<b>EXPERIENCE FROM PREVIOUS SCHOOL</b>	SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT
	BEHAVIOUR IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT
	CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT
	LEARNING
	TEACHER
	SCHOOL

### *SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT*

This sub-theme shows the differences in the experience of education for participants, based on school success according to the regular program or to the special program, which is carried out in mainstream schools. In the analysis of the statements, the participants express differences in experience of education according to the regular program and education according to a special program in mainstream schools. They stated that they had -good school success according to the regular program; "Oh, they didn't."...(in the old school, the subjects weren't difficult)... "History"(was his most difficult subject)... "Mathematics"... (was the easiest subject for him)... (M13)

"All A (5)".... I didn't have any problems in the subjects, I knew everything and I got straight A's...Yes.....

*(he didn't have to study much and it wasn't difficult for him)... (M12)*

One of the main reasons for coming to the Centre, according to participants, is mainly *bad school success according to the regular program- or generally bad success in a regular school; "I failed the class and had to come here".... "Because of bad grades".... (M2)*

*...And we had an exam towards the end, I didn't really study, then I was giving answers without meaning, answered incorrectly and that's why I failed... Well... the class".... "Yes..."..( he failed the fifth grade at the old school). (M8)*

Other participants' express satisfaction and *good school achievement under a special program (in a regular school);*

*"Physical health culture, technical culture, what needed to be done..."(everything was going well for him)... "Nnn...(shakes his head)...I didn't have physics and chemistry..."...(shakes his head)..(to answer that he didn't study the same as the other students in the class)... "I followed a special program... According to an adapted..." (educational program). (M5)*

Because of their experience, the participants developed mainly negative *attitudes towards school success in regular school: "Nothing! She's stupid...(quietly).. Oh, she's stupid!!... So school! She is stupid !!(laughs...).... "School is...School is school, it looked good like school...Good...(silent)" (M3)*

As a type of confirmation that it was difficult in regular school, one participant states that close family members also had difficulties in mastering teaching material in his old school- his *sister has problems at school/problems with learning; " Yes!" ...(brother and sister go to his old school)... "No, only my sister goes there...Good. ...And there were problems, but..."... "...Learning. ...And I don't even know, she didn't learn something...what she told me..., something the teacher...I don't know...I'm not knowledgeable..... and...I don't care what she does..."(M3)*

BEHAVIOUR IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

This subtheme describes issues and situations regarding behaviour problems, before coming to the Centre, which the participants pointed out in their statements and were triggered by different situations and other person behaviour. It also shows a pattern of behaviour related to personal satisfaction, self-image and confidence in the school environment.

Due to their experience during the educational process in mainstream schools, the participants express differences in memories of the last school and the different situations they had that caused them to manifest *inappropriate behaviour during lessons in a regular school*; *"We fool around..."(during the lessons)... "We were fooling around" (with the professor).... "No, poorly... Poorly "... "Well, not in every lesson... It depends when I feel like (I wanted to) write... I didn't ... every lesson..."..... "With everyone." ...(he was joking with classmates). (M1)*

There were situations when participants felt nervousness and discomfort, four participants stated that they often left class or that they ran away from class; *" We used to run away... Home..." .... "Yes..."(they just left without telling anything to the class teachers)... "No... But I didn't feel like being there" ..... "Nature (the subject)..." .... "Yes....the teacher examined... and we wrote the test." (F3)*

In previous school, participants had different situations that can be seen as the possible reasons why they were transferred to different school or wanted to leave; ...." *and because of behaviour...."..."All... I was fighting...."...." Smashing up with friends and that...."..."No!... It was just lying, but it wasn't theft."...." Fighting!...With a boy....Who was in the fourth grade..."...(is the worst thing he has done)... "Nothing, he...beat me up..."..." Well, no, I beat him first...before ....then he beat me ..."...." No.... (quietly)" ...the other boy was to blame...." Yes"..*(he was expelled from school). (M2)**

Because of situations with aggressive behaviour, that were triggered by the peers, the participant stated that he- *refused to go to school because of peers' mocking*; *"So I fought..."...".Aha.." (he had been fighting since the first day of school)...." I haven't exactly from the first day,... it passed... it passed a month, two, three, they started mocking me ... and what, there was a fight. .. Yes!"... "And what, then the guy provoked me and says... I talk to him... and nothing, what, you provoke me and I'll beat you up and that's it..."... "Yes! ..No! "(he didn't know what else he could do) (M3)*

The participants reported that they found themselves in the situations with teachers and that there was some - *aggressive behaviour towards the teacher: "I argued.....with the teacher (very quiet)" (M1)*

Some of the participants had conflicting and aggressive situations with the principal *due to the inappropriate behaviour of the principal; "Well, it's a skirmish, what... it's not a skirmish..... the dude has been hanging out as the interceptor for all week... and threw a chair and what...".... "Yes!"...(he threw a chair at the headmaster)... "Yes! Yes...it's not really like that...in the corridor...the guy(headmaster)...(loud and quite angry) every break I had to stand next to him (headmaster) and the guy (headmaster) annoys me...I left and that gay (principal) ..I get a slap and what... and calls me again ...and what...I mean..." (M3)*

Because of describing inappropriate situations, the participants became visibly excited and nervous, almost aggressive, due to the force and discomfort of the situation they were describing; *"...Mmmmm..it was not good.... " ... " Because they were constantly teasing me, then I got into fights and the principal was constantly cursing my mother... Cursing my mother (laughs aggressively)"... "Yes!" (he was often interviewed by the principal) (M9)*

The behaviour of the participants and some suspicions and accusations are the reason why some participants had the experience of being interviewed by the police; *"Yes, I spent time up there... I was up there (quietly, looking down at his hands)... I was at the police station once and that gay (policeman) came to my home..."... "I didn't!"...(got a police file).. " Nothing, she wrote down what I said, why, "Why did you do that?"... I say "Because he provoked me " ..and she writes that.....I was there for an hour...an hour and a half, she wrote... iiii... she says "You can go home now"... "Nothing. .. She just wrote it down... and that's it..." (M3)*

As a method of solving the problems of students with disabilities - due to inappropriate behaviour, he was given a teaching assistant; *"... (He) started making problems, lately (he was) talking in the back row and then the female students (from the faculty) came... and what, they sat with me there... (big smile)... And some guys came there like to protect me... because I am (was) constantly making problems and... " ... "And this Marko, some two guys, and I know them in Zaprešić, I saw them when they passed by...".... "And I don't know anything (in Croatian: „nemam blage!“)!.. They came there the other day to guard (me)... If I do any shit, the guys calm me down right away..." (M3)*

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

The sub-theme *Classroom environment* contains codes which explain some noticeable differences that the participants pointed out, related to the classroom environment in the previous school, before coming to the Centre.

One of the important differences between the previous school and the Centre which the participants noticed and highlighted in their statements is the differences in class size- *small class or larger class*, which most participants commented; *"In my class when I was first, there were about four, five of us."* (M12)

*"Well, well..(quietly)..25. "..(was in the class)... "I don't know, 20 girls, 5 boys... "Yes!"...(there were fewer boys)..."* (M3)

Also, as a difference, in the previous school students could *choose with whom they would sit at the school desk*; *"In the last one."... "Yes, by two each."... "Ah, yes... With a friend."*... *"Yes."...(he himself chose who he would sit with).... "No,,,"..(the teacher did not object to his choice)* (M1)

For this reason, some participants consciously *chose to sit alone in the back of the classroom*; *"Aloo.... Alone!.. In the last (row)! (laughs)... Yes!...(laughs)"*,,, *"Huh?!....Left at the end...."...* *"Yes! There were four school desk..."* ... *"The whole time...What..."*...(was sitting alone...)... *"No, I didn't, so I came there..."* (M3)

For some participants, the seating arrangement in the class was completely unimportant, so it was not even important to remember the name of the girl with whom she sat at the school desk (in the back of the classroom):

*"Behind...First...With some girl." ... "Iva....Is...yes"..(she was her best friend)..."Yes...It's...Iva"...*(was sitting in the back row) (F3)

*"I forgot..."*...(what was her name)... *"Little girl..."* (F2)

Some participants look at the seating position in the class, as a form of how the teachers treated them - *she was sitting alone*; *"I sat in the first one (school desk), and then when she didn't want to... she didn't want to work with me, then I sat in the last, in the back of the class, alone... Yes."* (F2)

LEARNING

The subtheme displays specific situations and attitudes towards school obligations and the existence of awareness that they have difficulties in mastering the teaching content, related to the learning before coming to the Centre. In their statements, the participants substantiate the situations in which it is evident that they are *aware of their difficulties in mastering school content*; *"What do I know?! (quietly)...Everything. "... (it was difficult for him)... "Difficult...Well"... (was in classes)... "Well, what...Ah" (it was difficult to remember and understand the material) (M1)*

Because they had difficulties in mastering the teaching material - *difficulties in mastering the contents in a regular school*; *"I finished... no, I fell fifth there and then when I came there I'm in fifth again." .... "Class fifth B" (M1)*

Participants needed support and help in learning - *she needed help in mastering school subjects*; *"I don't know."... (why she needed help for studying)... "Is...Mom" ... (told her that the teacher will help her in math) (F3)*

There is a difference in the experience of the participants between classroom teaching and subject teaching in a regular school - *in the lower grades, there were no problems with learning and adopting the teaching content*; *"Weeell, we copied more text from the board ...Okay...Yes". (he managed to write everything off the board)... Ah, well, I didn't feel like studying..." (M1)*

*"History, Geography... that was Buzija (his name for teacher)...I learned something, you have to show (on the map) the sides of the world, and where the equator is and you get an A (5) for showing on the map.....You answer three, or four questions, you get A(5), and you can go to your place (to seat)... and what...." (M3)*

Participants had an *awareness of difficulties in mastering school content*; *"W...hat do I know?!..(quietly)..Everything. "... ( was difficult for him)... "Difficult...Well"...( in the classes)... "Well, what...Ah"( it was difficult to remember and understand the material)... "The test...that's just...Aha". (was the most difficult). " Yes.(quietly)"...(once he could only answer the material)(M1)*

TEACHER



The subtheme contains codes associated with or are the participants' memories about a teacher from a previous school, before coming to the Centre.

When participants answered questions related to education in the period before coming to the Centre, their experiences as well as their memories of teachers differed. Participants mostly *remember the teacher from the regular school* but often only a superficial physical appearance; *"I don't know."...(what was the name of the teacher at the old school)..."Nice. She was younger... 25, 26...Beautiful." (she looked)... "Blue. ...Long"...hair..."No.....(points with his hand)...shoulder length"... "Mm."...( he did not remember what kind of face she had and the color of her eyes)..."Yes."...(she was groomed and pampered)..."Yes." (she was pretty)..."Skinny....Tall..." (M2)*

*Yes...Good, she was our English teacher, but she taught us ....Yes, but I don't remember anymore."* (M8) (Participant went to the same school from the first to the fourth grade)

Some participants had a *positive memory of a class teacher*; *" Some yes, some no." (listened during the class)... "We did." (heard well and saw what was on the board)... "No."...(the teacher was not angry at her or her friends) (F3)*

The majority of participants said that the teacher helped them in some subjects *the teacher helped in mastering the lesson*; *„Weeelll...she said“... „The pedagogue“ (said to her mother)...* *„I don't know...“(why)....„Yes...“ (someone told her that the teacher would help her with mathematics).... „Mom..“(told her that the teacher will help)...* (Did any other teacher help you?)...(nodding) ...”Yes!...” ... (In math?)...”Oh yeah...”....” No..”(Teacher didn't help you with Croatian?)... (F3)

Most of the participants stated some facts that suggested that they have a *negative memory of the teacher (from the previous school)*; *I came there, I'm yelling there...that (he) wants to write me F(1)... I say "Come on, write me F (1)" and he won't... to write me an F (1), but give me D(2). ....D..D....I said only two words and (he) give me D (2) ."(M3)*

From the statements it follows that different situations contribute to such a memory - *the teacher did not want to help*; *"And then... Both she (the teacher) and that one from Mathematics also didn't want to work with me and then she let me go..." ... "For example, in Mathematics, she writes some tasks on the board, you write, and other children call her, she comes. I called*



*her, she didn't want to come...you have to do it by yourself" ... " She was good, but I couldn't study, I had problems and then she blamed me for the problem, I couldn't study there, then she didn't want to work with me, talk to me, help me and then... I told my mom...Mom talked to Dad and (Dad) then transferred me there..." (to the Centre) (F2)*

For the participants, such situations when the teacher wouldn't help them, triggered feelings such as *fear of asking the teacher for help (fear of the teacher)*; "Yes... Well, once..." *...(because he can't read and write) ... "Yes (stutters)..." (he never dared to ask for help) "A hundred times I....nothing and..." (M1)*

*" A-a....no....A-a "... (she never asked teacher to help her) (F3)*

Even situations such as - *fear when answering the teacher's questions*; "Oh, like...it was a little scary" ... "Yes, what can I say." ... "Yes!" *(he was afraid whenever the teacher asked something) (M6)*

Participants described the situations that demanded the teachers to get involved but *the teacher did not take the necessary action* that contributed to the feeling of fear and bad memories; "Yes!" *..(students from his class beat him).... (There was) "Enough!" of those hooligans in the class (in the Croatian: " hahara") ... "They didn't want to do anything!" (the teachers at the old school)..." No!..." , none of the teachers or the principal wanted to do anything. (M5)*

Finally, due to the previously described situations, the participants stated that some of them refused to go to school; " And then I told my mom-I won't go to that school anymore. She didn't want to help me" and then *..I...my mom transferred me." (F2)*

*"Nothing (quiet)..No...(quiet, looking down)"(he doesn't have a problem at school).. "I'm bored! (loud)" ....I don't feel like being in class." .... "Even worse (very quiet)"...(felt when we need to read and write)... "Well, I don't know..." (M1)*

### SCHOOL

The subtheme displays some noticeable differences that the participants pointed out in the following statements, related to going to school before coming to the Centre.

Participants have different memories - *memories of school from the regular education system and relation to past educational institutions*; "Luka ... In S\*... Yes."... "From the first to the

*fifth."*... *"It was big, it had windows... Yellow (colour)... Five (floors)... "Is..." (there were a lot of students).. "First C". (F3)*

For some, the positive factor was that *the previous school was near the parents' home;* *"Yes"...(he went to the old school every morning from home)... "No, they came to pick me up, and I went back alone." (M13)*

The possibility of going home also contributed to a positive experience – *attitude towards going to school according to the regular program;..."I have a computer, I write on my computer and I write my homework"* (M13)

And also to a positive memory of a class teacher; *(His class teacher) "Yes...Okay, she was our English teacher, but she taught us ... "Jasminka .. well (she treated them)... "Good .... yes" ( in teaching subject) (M8)*

From some statements of the participants, it can be concluded that they had a different experience of education that caused their attitude towards to the past educational institution: *(Before, he went to) "Regular"(school)... "No!".(he doesn't remember the name of that school).... "In P\*"...( the name of the school he used to go to)... "Yes"..(the school was closer to his home)... (M2)*

This experience of education has created factors through which participants evaluate the memory of the previous school - *school from the regular education system* for some participants were positive; *"It was great"( in another school)... "If I hung out with my friends and played on the playground there, they have a playground there as well as in the Centre. A small playground. I ate, rested a little." (M12)*

For some participants it brought back negative memories; *"That school didn't make me happy..." (M13)*

Regardless of other life opportunities, participants who have been linked to *the school weren't near their parents' homes* as the reason why they didn't go home every day; *(In the old school) "In S\*?...No.. " (he didn't go home every day)... "I slept there too." (M7)*

Therefore, even when they described the previous school in general specific factors made them comfortable in that school-; *"Outside (they spent their break)...There is a park..Outside." (F3) or uncomfortable because she didn't like the classroom they were in; "On the fifth"... (floor of*

*the school)... " Somehow... It wasn't good."... "Some... Prehuman some...Prehuman .... Yes." ..(they had some posters and pictures on the walls) (F3)*

The two themes regarding perceptions of the life experience of students with disabilities in the period of life before coming to the Centre, *Foster family and community* and *Others* are left for display as the last because they specifically appear in only one of the generations of participants (3rd generation).

#### 6.1.1.4. The fourth theme is *FOSTER FAMILY AND COMMUNITY FOR CHILDREN*

Table 11. Theme *Foster family and community* with sub-themes

In this theme, it was impossible to strictly separate the obtained subthemes, because in the statements of the participants, the feelings about relocation and the awareness of their own behaviour as the cause of relocation are intertwined (Table 11).

<b>FOSTER FAMILY AND COMMUNITY FOR CHILDREN</b>	BEHAVIOUR IN THE FOSTER FAMILY /COMMUNITY FOR CHILDREN
	EMOTIONAL REACTIONS OF THE CHILD AND THE PRIMARY FAMILY TO MOVING FROM THE FOSTER FAMILY
	LIFE IN A FOSTER FAMILY

BEHAVIOUR IN THE FOSTER FAMILY /COMMUNITY FOR CHILDREN

Due to inadequate family relationships, some (four) participants stated that they were separated from their primary families and *placed in communities for children or foster families*: “Well, I was in that community with some people and from them I went to my home and school and so on...Because my mother was in... uh... in a safe house, so they transferred me to school in (different town) because I was educated there.” (F4)

The form of accommodation changed depending on the situation and by a Court decision: “Into that community for children ”... (she was moved)... “Normally, aunt, uncle” (they called the educators) (F4) and her behaviour in the foster family/ community and behaviour at the second transfer depended on everyday situation; “I was a little good, a little bad.” ..in that community (F4)... “Normal, aunt, uncle”.. (called the educators)... “ And they took me from there because I caused problems.” (F4) (Separated from the foster family because she caused problems)

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS OF THE CHILD AND THE PRIMARY FAMILY TO MOVING FROM THE FOSTER FAMILY

In terms of this sub-themes, it highlights self-awareness of changed relationships and feelings caused by changing accommodations and developing behaviour patterns. According to participants understanding, the decision was made by a specific person: ” This one...the one over there...” (she means the social worker) ...“Yes”....(he) has decided that she cannot go to her family....“That. That's why he put me together with my aunt... Yes.”... that's why he found a foster aunt for her... (F5)

After accepting the situation with the primary family and adjustments to the newly created situation appeared *Emotions due to leaving the foster family* and a *Sense of guilt at the second transfer*;

“Yes”(she was placed in a foster family)...” Well, it was good for me” (in that foster family)...”And they took me from there because I caused problems.... I was sad to leave, but...I still realized that I made a mistake.” ,,,,“Yes”(thinks that she is to blame for the transfer)(F4)

LIFE WITH A FOSTER FAMILY

Responding to questions about family life, during the interview, some situations have emerged that participants did not often talk about or had difficulty talking about it. Thus, they spoke of life with a foster family with visible shyness; *"..Like mom..." "Yes"...(when he changed schools, he lived with his aunt, who took him from the children's home )..." And when I don't have parents (looking down).... Yes. ... Yes. At the age of two (was taken to the foster family)"... "No. I call her mom." (M11)*

*"Well, it was good" (in that foster family)...."They had children who were also living there as me and went to school." ... "No".. (the foster families had no children of their own) (F4)*

6.1.1.5. The fifth theme is ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE USE OF PHARMACOTHERAPY

The last theme, *attitude towards the use of pharmacotherapy*, is specific due to the perception of the life experience of students with disabilities before coming to the Education Centre, through the important issue of taking pharmacotherapy.

Participants compare periods of life before coming to the Centre through the fact that they didn't need to take pharmacotherapy in their old school; *„I didn't."...take therapy in the old school“...” We could go out until half past 1. That school always decided when they could go out at night. I came back sometimes at 1 a.m., sometimes at 2 a.m., sometimes at 3 a.m. And so I stopped taking therapy." (M13)*

From the statements of the participants, it can be concluded that in the context of comparing with life before coming to the Centre, taking pharmacotherapy is perceived as very restrictive and makes them very dissatisfied; *“Nothing! (quietly) ...Nothing! Here's to therapy and be in school!.."... "Well, what ... what that... it's better when you take Lupocet 0.5 than this..." (M3)*

### 6.1.2. Perceptions of life experience of adolescents with disabilities in the period of life in the Centre

This subchapter will present themes identified during the period of life at the Centre. As for the previous period, due to the large number of codes that appear in the processing of the results, codes that suggest the answers to the research questions will be shown in more detail. A complete table of themes, sub-themes and codes can be found in the Appendix 7.

#### 6.1.2.1. The first theme is the CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLING IN THE PREVIOUS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

The first important theme is the *Characteristics of schooling in the previous educational institution*. The theme illustrates the differences in education period in the mainstream school. Adolescents with disabilities spoke about this topic when they were currently living in the Centre and from direct experience, by comparing life in the Centre, they described all the differences between their current and previous lives when they attended another school.

Table 12: Theme *Characteristics of schooling in the previous educational institution* with sub-themes

CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLING IN THE PREVIOUS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION	BEHAVIOUR OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
	ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCHOOL STAFF FROM THE MAINSTREAM SCHOOL
	SCHOOL SUCCESS IN THE REGULAR PROGRAM
	ATTITUDE TOWARDS EMPLOYEES FROM THE PREVIOUS SCHOOL

#### BEHAVIOUR OF ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES

It should be noted regarding this sub-theme that the participants in their statements often linked the behaviour as one of the reasons why they been transferred to a special school. That's why as the main characteristic of education in previous educational institutions, the participants pointed out various situations in which the main problems included their inappropriate behaviour - *fighting and unjustified hours due to leaving classes; "Beating, thrashing, all kinds of things" (in the old/regular school)..."Beated, thrashed...Yes..."..." Well, then I got a*

*reprimand and that's it....I did not receive a reprimand, but they decided that I should leave the school... "Yes"..(he was expelled from school)" (M10)*

*"Aha..(nods his head)... And absences from the class (markiranja in Croatian)... I've got 189 unjustified..."... "Nice! I didn't feel like it!"..(to be in the class) (M3)*

Problematic behaviour they did individually or participated in group situations; *"I broke the window and so on.... Ok, we did some stupid things and so on...and thieving god and so on..." (F5)*

Among such is *throwing fireworks at other students; "I was doing some stupidity with my friend....throwing firecrackers at the feet of some guys." (M13)*

Through a question *about the behaviour in the previous school, the participants stated that problems arose because he received a remark (unjustified hours) because of singing a folk song despite the teacher; "Yes... what we sang, we had a Music lesson and then... and the teacher didn't want to let me and my friend sing, and we sang folk songs, and then she gave me an F (1), I (hit her ) with a chair." (M4)*

However, when describing the situation, they still cited possible reasons for their transfer to another school pointed the fact that *participants failed a class in the regular system; ... "Well, I was bad at studying, I guess I failed, I don't remember, I guess I failed the class, so I came here. I don't really remember".... "Yes." ..(he came to the Centre because he failed his class).... " Yes."...(he failed the fifth grade because he did not have an adapted program) (M7)*

They mention learning problems and the consequences of *head injuries* they had in childhood; *"And then..then one a bicycle (was hit by ), so I got the racket (in her head) when I was little. And then I couldn't study." (F2)*

*"...That I have to go to another school...because of bad reading"... " Yes"...(that was the reason)... "Yes...Same"... (and difficulties with Mathematics) (F3)*

SCHOOL SUCCESS IN THE REGULAR PROGRAM

The subtheme *School success in the regular program* is also connected to the participant's understanding of the reason for moving to a special school. The participant stated that they had *problems with Reading and Mathematics*, as opposed to the statement that *it wasn't difficult to study in the regular program*, which is why there is a possibility they don't know or don't understand the reason for their relocation; "*That I have to go to another school...due to bad reading " ... " Yes"...(that was the reason)... "Yes...Same" ... (and difficulty with Mathematics) (F3)*

It is the same with understanding *poor success in the regular program* as the reason for going to a special school; "*I finished... no, I failed the fifth grade there and then when I came here I was back to the fifth grade... Fifth B ...." (M1) "*

*Causing inappropriate situations in school* also appeared in these codes because the participants talked about different situations in which they entered into physical conflicts with teachers- the participant fought with the teacher; "*I fought...with teachers...Yes." ... " And I hit the teacher with a chair." .... (M4)*

Due to such and similar situations, the participant's parents were invited to *an interview with the pedagogue*; "*The pedagogue said... It would be great to go to another school... Only because of these... Who beat me... " ... "Yes! (very quietly)"...(the school pedagogue said that he would be better off in another school) (M5).*



### 6.1.2.2. The second theme is the CHARACTERISTICS OF TRANSITION TO THE CENTRE

This topic is marked by the emotions and experiences encountered by adolescents with disabilities upon their arrival, or shortly after arriving at the Centre. Here, they faced situations that differed significantly from those they were previously accustomed to.

Table 13: Theme *Characteristics of transition to the Centre* with sub- themes

<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF TRANSITION TO THE CENTRE</b>	PERSONS AND SERVICES INVOLVED IN THE TRANSFER TO THE CENTRE
	TIME OF TRANSITION TO THE CENTRE
	EMOTIONAL REACTIONS ON ARRIVAL AT THE CENTRE
	PARENTS' REACTIONS TO THE TRANSITION TO THE CENTRE

#### PERSONS AND SERVICES INVOLVED IN THE TRANSFER TO THE CENTRE

The sub-theme in itself suggests which persons have an important and/or key role in making the decision to transfer from a regular school to a special school, but also suggests an answer to the question of the issue of decision-making for adolescents with disabilities.

In most cases, participants stated that they didn't know *who decided on the special education system*; "No...(laughs)"....(no one told her that she was going to another school).... "But maybe mother did..." (told her the mother that she is going to transfer to another school)... "Aaa...Maybe someone told me, but I don't know who...(laughs)"...(F1)

In cases when some specific situations were present in the regular school, the decision most often was made by *parents and regular schools, to transfer to a special education system*; "The school pedagogue said... It would be great for you to go to another school... Only because of those... Who beat me..."..."Yes! (very quietly)"...(the school pedagogue said that he would be better off, in another school) (M5).

It was the same when participants were involved in risky situations, which included inappropriate behaviour;

"Well, half one, half other..." (The decision was made by the parents and the "old" school)... "(he is silent at first)...They agreed... Who knows what would have happened if I had been

*there... " ... " The old men agreed (meaning father) " .... "Yes, because more... I was problematic, that guy challenged me and what could they do now? They arranged everything that... where there is another one and... that's how I came here..." (M7)*

In such situations, the school often reacted by inviting the parents to discuss the situation, and then the mother decided that he would be educated in the Centre; “ *And she came... .. my Old lady (meaning mother) came to school and said ... that was on Wednesday, Old lady said – from Friday you're not going to this school anymore ... Why? That's why the principal called the Old lady to the school and said "Will you sign that I kick him out of school?". The Old lady says "I will". And signed..."(M3)*

*Precisely because of such situations with behaviour problems, some participants were under the supervision of the Centre for Social Welfare and it decided about the transition to a special education system; “Social (service)...and because of behaviour..."..." ...Social....social...(quietly)... Social, my... “ “(M2)*

Such a decision of the social service makes them angry; *"Yes!"..(he understands why the social service made such a decision)... "For some social reasons, what did she write and why did the judge get that report from the social service..."... "Yes!"...(that's nonsense to him)... "Because they are retarded, what can I tell you".... "Yes! Like, something isn't family..... what isn't family!?" (M3)*

The participants stated that they often complain to their parents about unpleasant situations in regular (old) school, which caused the parents to react- *parents decided to transfer to a special education system; “...and then I cried to my mother and then my mother said "You will change your school" and then I changed my school and came here" ... "I told mom... mom talked to dad and dad then transferred me there..." ... "And then my mother transferred me. "You're not crazy, you can learn, you can't, you couldn't learn" (F2)*

Arriving at the Centre wasn't easy for the participants. The participants mostly came with their parents, that is, most often they *came with their mothers*, which made it even more difficult emotionally for the participants; *"Everything. (quietly)" ..(he met when he arrived at the Centre)... "No (quietly)" (he didn't talk to any of the professional associates upon arrival).... "Mama. (silent)" (brought him to the Centre).*

TIME OF TRANSITION TO THE CENTRE

When it was discussed about the time of arrival at the Centre, the participants answered that they came in the period of *classroom teaching*; "...came to the Centre in the third grade... Yes, in the third grade." (M7)

Some participants came at the period of *subject teaching*; "I came to your Centre in the seventh grade... "Yes!" he came in the 7th grade, and that was last school year... " (M5)

The time of arrival within the school year was also varied in statements, some came at the beginning of the school year, some at the very end of the school year; "No!"...(he didn't arrive at the Centre in the first grade)... "In the fifth... At the end." (M8)

When moving to the Centre, one participant was allowed to pass the class exam, and he thinks his mother asked for it - *passing the class exam – to be transferred to a higher class*; "Last... last year somewhere."... "Sixth...(quiet)"... "Sixth...what's (kaj tu in Croatian)...maybe it was a month before over, then I came in the seventh... and then they kicked me (šaltali in Croatian) in the eighth..."

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS ON ARRIVAL AT THE CENTRE

The participants had different experiences and emotional reactions when they came to the Centre. Some were prepared and had information, while others *were not told anything* in preparation for coming to the new school; "No."...(he thinks that nobody told him anything about the Centre when he came)... "I don't remember it was a long time ago" (M7)

Some participants *felt good when they came to the Centre*, even happy to move to a new school.; "I was glad..."... "Great... With mom." (M12).

"I was happy that I moved here." (F4)

"It was nice...Yes..."... "Nice..."... "Good"...(F1)

Some participants described their arrival at the Centre as a good experience, and they immediately liked everything which made them *feel good when arrived at the Centre*; "Yes. No!"...(from the beginning everything was great).... (he liked it the most) "They treated me

*decently... and... I have no idea..." ... "No..." (nothing was ugly).... "Yes."... (everything was fine in the Centre right away)... "No"... (nothing was unusual for him)... "No."... (it was not unusual that he had to stay in the Centre for the whole week)... "And I'm used to it...".... " And I got used to it when I was there for a week, then I got used to it." ... "No."...(it's not difficult for him). (M4)*

One participant reported feeling good- *she felt good being surrounded by other students, not giving too much importance to the change that took place; " It was. "... (it suited her that there were more children in the room)... "Yes."... (she had someone to hang out with)... "The same."... (it suited her that they all go to breakfast together) (F3)*

Being in the environment of other students in the Centre for some participants made it possible to feel better and to *have a feeling of satisfaction upon arrival; "Good"... (was sleeping in the room with several boys)... "Few."...( boys sharing a room with him )... "The first time I was not...to go home...(pauses)"... "... (no answer, looking down)....he nods his head..." (he was not surprised that he couldn't go home and see his Mom and Dad) (M14)*

In their statements, the participants expressed their attitude towards the decision to come to the Centre - *relation to the decision on accommodation in the Centre; ... "Aaaa....so so (tak-tak in Croatian)" ... (attitude toward the decision to transfer, when he came to the Centre)... "That's why I can't be at home every day." ... "No!" in the Centre no one beats you, no one mistreats you, no one of adults and principals curses your mother". (M9)*

Some participants had a hard time accepting the decision - *the decision to come to the Centre was made by his guardian: "My guardian. Ivanka...(very quietly and looking out the window)" (M13)*

One participant expressed strong *emotions about attending a different school; "Well, what... what can I tell her... "What... I didn't! (angrily)" ... "Here I am!" heck..... I did, what the hell....what is there now in the loggia...there was also worse, there was also G\*...and P\* I V\* (names of previous schools) and what else was there!? K\*.....! And I had to come here..."... "Yes! (angry)" ... (he just needed to change schools)... "She dug me in...she buried me here... "What, she buried me here so that I... if I have to go here to the Centre, am I crazy!..." (M3)*

One participant in his statements specifically declaratively accepts the decision made by the mother but it is evident from the content of his statements that he doesn't understand such a decision and why the mother made it - *agreeing with the decision to attend the Centre*; *"I didn't understand if it was ugly (meaning bad) or good. I didn't understand that."...* *Now I understand..." ... "Which?... Well, it means that she's had enough of me and wants to take a break from me, to stop doing stupid things at home and..." ... "I guess she wants to take a mental break from me... I know how to do some stupid things at home, so..."* (M12)

Expresses his *relation to the mother's decision to place him in the Centre* with seeming peace and acceptance;

*"Everything is great, give me five (Sve je super, sve pet - in Croatian)."...* *(he has nothing against his mother's decision to place him in the Centre)..."I did get a little sad, but it soon passed...Ah..."* (M12)

But still expresses *disappointment because of own fate*; *"I don't know why."..."I guess that's how mom unlearned... Aha...".... "I didn't understand whether it was ugly or good. I didn't understand that..."* (M12)

For some participants, coming to the Centre was emotionally difficult; *"Then I cried when my dad was leaving, I cried so much that (social worker) had to comfort me." ... "Yes."...* *(it was a little easier for him then)...* *"I went crazy, I couldn't stay any longer. I called my Dad, I have my Dad's number and I call him every day at the hospital." ... "And sad. When I didn't see my dad anymore."* (M13)

The participants' feelings about the Centre depended on the situation when they first arrived at the Centre; *"I came here, I didn't understand because I was this big" (he points out how small he was with his fingers)". ... "I didn't know where I was going to sleep, so I went back to Vinkovci"...* *"This van, the same one with the red cross."... (brought him back to the Centre).* *"And it's not. My dad ended up in the hospital when I ended up here...and then I came here and then they put me in one room, then in another room, then in a third room...I moved to another room many times."..."I don't remember that anymore."...(in which room did he sleep when he came)* (M13)

For some of the participants *in the beginning, it was difficult to accept the new school, but later it was easier*; "Yes. Just a little nervous at the beginning...."... "Yes!"...(he was a little scared)... "Yes, it was a bit difficult, at first I was afraid to be with anyone... I don't know how... I haven't met friends, what they are like..." (M6)

Staying weekly in the Centre was *unusual and different*; "At the beginning, it was unusual for me, but in the end it's good." (M12)

"Yes... It was strange for me... When I didn't go home, that first day when I didn't come. Then they told me, Mr.(social worker) - then you will go (home) on the second Friday."... "Yes. Now I go home every Friday."... "Yes... I agree."... (it feels good to go home every Friday). (M14)

Although most of the participants pointed out that they had a hard time not going home every day, they mentioned some other specific situations that caused them to have *bad feelings when arrived at the Centre*; "Ugly!"...(first arrival in the Centre)...."That everything was wonderful and beautiful here ... But it is not"... "Why do you have to go to bed early and that...Yes!"...(that's a big problem for him)... "And getting up early!! (loud)" (M2)

"Bad! ...The first day immediately bad... Why did I come here...damn it...same ...same...and I felt bad....why...like in prison. It's not really a prison, but I came here...what do I have to do..." (M3)

Bad feelings when arrived at the Centre are also connected with some new situations that were different for them than before and they were not used to them. Regardless of gender, participants expressed *discomfort due to common showering*; "I did."... (got to know the Centre)... "Yes, yes!"... I was embarrassed!"... (going to the shower with everyone) ... "Then I got used to it and that's it."

"I didn't!...I went later...Yes.."...(been the last one to take a shower)... "Yes!..." (he was hiding the body with a towel)... "Yes!"...(now he's used to it)...

"It's not good!...According to everything!"... (so many boys to go to wash together).... "It's ugly!"... "It's ugly when we all have to go together and that... No..."(he doesn't like it) (M2)

Regardless of gender, participants also expressed dissatisfaction with the situation of common showering at the Centre; "Yes, then I went to the bathroom with my things and then I took a shower in the bathroom."...(it was embarrassing)..." And in the morning, and then I got

*dressed. Then they... then the lady asked me "Why do you always shower in the morning?", then I said "I also shower in the morning at home", then she said "Good" and so I got used to it." (F2)*

### PARENTS' REACTIONS TO THE TRANSITION TO THE CENTRE

Regarding the transfer to another school, the parents of the participants had different opinions and these were based on some factors. If the situations in the previous school was specific, the parents were generally satisfied with the transfer to another, special school - *mother's satisfaction with transferring to another school; "Because they move me? ...So she said thank God that you left that community." (F4)*

In cases where the decision to transfer was made by the previous school or the Social Welfare Centre, the parents weren't necessarily satisfied with such a decision - *parents' were anger about going to another school because it required additional costs; „ Well, they yelled at me." ... "Yes"...(they were angry at him)... "Mmm...both."... "No, they were angry because... because of the distance..." ... "Well, because of the distance, to pick me up every day and so on."...." Yes..."...(he went home every day)... "Yes"..(it was far for them to travel). (M10)*

Some participants stated that parents had *indifferent attitudes towards the child's transfer to a special school:..."(no answer)... Aha... Nothing." ... (his parents did not say anything about his sadness about moving to a special school)... "Okay, he can go...Yes"...(the parents just agreed with the decision) (M14)*

*"It's little. ...Beti wasn't well, that's my sister's name, Beti. It was not good for Betica that I had a change of accommodation. And to my brother, he was in a good mood, in a good mood...and to my mom, she was also in a good mood. And my stepfather, what do I know." (M12)*

Most of the participants state that the *father expresses more dissatisfaction and anger due to the decision to transfer to another school; "Mom and dad... Nothing." (they didn't say that he had to go to another school)... "Mmmm...a little"...(his parents were angry with him)... "Dad."...(was the most angry, and mom) "No"....(dad was angry)... "Jooj... ..Aha."...( he was very angry) (M4)*

*"They are sorry!... Dad!"... "Yes. "... (dad is more sorry that he goes to a special school)... "Yes!"... (dad would have preferred if he had stayed in the old school) (M2)*

The parents' reaction is most often described as such because of confusion - the *father's confusion when the child transfers to another school; . "I don't know" ... (whether the parents decided that he must go to school in the Centre).... " ... "Well, he didn't know either. And he said that it was better if I stayed at the school where my brother is." .... (his brother) "He went then at eight."... " And they felt sorry..." (the family was sorry that he was going to another school).... "And Dad? And it wasn't him... he was the same... he was the same, he didn't understand, he was confused... " ... "Yes, I think so. A social worker" ... explained to Dad about his transfer to another school, Centre." (M8)*

*That's why the father attempt to change the decision about education in special school; " Yes! ... bu...(Je!...al..in Croatian )"...(the father tried to change the decision)... "They didn't give him... social welfare..."... "It's not because I was behaving badly..."... "Yes!...they said that it must be so." (M2)*



### 6.1.2.3. The third theme is CHARACTERISTICS OF LIFE IN THE CENTRE

This topic presents some specific questions highlighted in the statements of the participants, related to the situations and emotions that were the participant's reaction to the new circumstances of life in the Centre.

Table 14: Theme Characteristics of life in the Centre with sub-themes

<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF LIFE IN THE CENTRE</b>	CHARACTERISTICS OF DAILY LIFE IN THE CENTRE
	DESCRIPTION OF LIFE IN THE CENTRE
	GOING HOME FOR THE WEEKEND FROM THE CENTRE
	EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO LIFE IN THE CENTRE

### CHARACTERISTICS OF DAILY LIFE IN THE CENTRE

As an important characteristic of life in the Centre the participants stated the *existence of a daily schedule of activities that must be respected*: “ *What about that? Well... Schedule .. what... I'm a little late, but it doesn't matter.. (laughs) ...*” (M3)

*"I come here, take my bag, go to the queue...yes...that's the schedule..." ... "Well, there are a lot of us, we go to breakfast, then we have to make the beds, we have to sweep, if there is anything after breakfast, we go in groups, if we are... Then there is a school in the afternoon."* (F2)

The main complaint of the participants is that there is *no possibility of having their schedule*; *What are the bad rules? And when we have to go earlier at 8 pm, when we have to go upstairs to shower and that. I would be out longer.".... "And somewhere until half past 11 pm."... "And waking up would be at half past 9, 9 when breakfast is" ... "Well, over the weekend. And when it's school, I really have to get up earlier to get dressed and wash and everything. The one over the weekend would be a little longer."* (M7)

Participants are aware that it can be different if they live at home, they would make their schedule; *"Well ok, but where can you go?!... You can't go anywhere ....except here...all the time...(quietly)" ... "I don't know...No.." ... (how would he spend the evening to feel better) (M1)*

*Waking up early and getting up* was highlighted as one of the bad situations and rules at the Centre; “Bad!”... *(he thought when you came to the Centre on the first day)*... “Everything!...why can't we watch TV longer, we can't go to concerts...”... “There are no”...*(more things that he doesn't like in the Centre)*.... “Well, that's the worst!”..*(waking up early and going to breakfast and then to school/group)*...Because I'm not used to waking up early.”... “Why did I have to go to bed early!” (M2)

The participants *deal with everyday situations in a special school* in different ways; “I have no idea.,no way...(quietly)”..*(he doesn't like going to bed early)*(M1)  
 “So that everyone can take a longer shower and that...Yes!”(F2)

As well as *performing various obligations*; “Well, it's different here, there are times when you go to sports, so you do something like this.... you work, you clean.... you make all kinds of things with clay and stuff like that...” (M10)

A positive aspect of the period in the Centre, according to almost all male participants, is *sports activities in a special institution that will remain in the memory*; “...And in regular school, where I used to go, there were no such sports, only when we...when they...now there are these sports only until the end of the school year...until the holidays ...But you don't go anywhere to get medals like that.”... “Yes”... *(you don't go to competitions)*... “Sports... Mmm...Yes...” *(and competitions will remain in his memory when he leaves the Centre)*... “Yes, I have 13 medals....Yes” (M10)

Participants understand that the rules of the Centre must be posted, which is why they are also aware of their *unacceptable behaviour in the Centre*; “The stupid things I did there in that Centre...(quietly).... Everything (quietly ... laughs)....Stealing,..... throwing containers into the forest,..... beating...I was breaking up the room.....I didn't listen to my educator.”(M10)

DESCRIPTION OF LIFE IN THE CENTRE

*(Bad situations in the Centre is)..." Well, no, when someone catches me doing something wrong... When I'm smoking too."... "It's fine not to have the same rules, but there are always some rules when you come to a dorm."*

*(about the rules in secondary school)" It will be, I think." (M11)*

Although they knew the rules existed, six participants expressed negative opposition to the no-smoking rules: *„Bad situations in the Centre... Well, no, when someone catches me doing something wrong... "When I smoke that too."...(he makes an agreement with ...)" I ask the educator and she lets me go..."... "Yes. But I go outside the Centre." (it is like an exhaust valve to him)... "Yes. "... (it will take a short walk)... "Three-four times...Yes." (in one day)... "Yes. Sometimes I don't really succeed that many times".... "Well, I take a walk, and sometimes I light a fire."... "Yes." ... (depending on the mood, he goes on a "smoking break") (M11)*

Such a rule angers the participants; *"Sometimes...what..."...he gets very angry)... "No way!... So I'm going, what, I'm going to smoke...I'm going to smoke a cigarette..."... " ...Nothing! ...I'm enjoying myself (zguuštam si in Croatian)... Pleasure! (Gušt in Croatian )... I'll smoke a cigarette, huh?!"... "Yes! Well, weell... that attracts me... I smoke to enjoy myself, what am I going to do? When I have cigarettes I light a cigarette. Your company smokes, what about me?... I'll not smoke ?..." (M3)*

GOING HOME FOR THE WEEKEND FROM THE CENTRE

The participants experience the most difficult fact that there is no possibility of going home every day, for some not even on weekends: *"What's the difference? ... I'm going home, this-that, you have time, everything..." (M1)*

*"You are not going home.... "Yes."...(staying for all week) (F3)*

Going home is a great motivation even for studying, which would certainly be easier: *"At home...Yes"...(he would rather go to school from home)... "Better."...(she would do well to write her homework at home) (F3)*

Some participants *don't go home every weekend* but according to the planned schedule and *also because of travel expenses for the parents; .“ (He stutters at the beginning of the answer...)...And that, I understand that because of this... what's it called... charging for it is a bit too much. Then I realized that I was going every second and that's how it stayed.”.. "Yes!"..(that's fine with him)... "Yes, because the cost is high."... "It was a bit difficult..."... "Yes!"... (he got used to it) (M6)*

To change that decision and the schedule of going home, parent's signature is required and then he *can go home every day; “And then... let's wait a week, that, ten, fifteen days, they came to pick me up... and then they signed that I would go home every day...”... "Yes. I felt bad... and that's it... because... why do I have to stay there during the week...” (M3)*

The participants associate the experience of the Centre with the possibility of going home every weekend; *„Here? ... Why do I have to stay for a week now!?”... "Aha!"..(it's hard for him that he has to stay in the Center)..." Every day at home and school.! Uff...Holy shit..."... "Well... (quietly)... Weeell... That with the Centres... That bothers me that I don't go home, with the fact that I don't go home every day..." (M3)*

### EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO LIFE IN THE CENTRE

The emotional reaction of the participants to their stay in the Centre is related to various factors, some significant or less important but still affect the overall emotional experience.

Such a factor is *feeling of dissatisfaction due to bad food; "Nothing...With food" (is dissatisfied)..." Well, they cook well... But the food is not good.... This dough with greens, phew!...No! " (M2)*

*Feelings about staying in the Centre* they express through the experience of different activities; *"Playing games, watching TV, eating, drinking, going for a walk and so on." ... " Which I don't like?...I don't like anything...I don't think there is anything I don't like in the Centre. I liked everything." ... "No..."(there is nothing wrong with him in the Centre)... "Yes..."(everything is fine and ok in the Centre) (M12)*

The reaction of the participants greatly affects the possibility of satisfying their wishes; *"Yes"...(he somehow managed to adapt)... "It's all old to me now, I'm just waiting when I'm*

*going to leave." ... "Yes." ... (he is looking forward to leaving the Centre)... "I don't know, I'm kind of sick. I don't really like that home..." ... "It's too much the way it's called, it's threatening... you can't smoke cigarettes and that." (M11)*

*Among the participants, the feeling of discomfort due to attending a special school is also present: "And now... What can we do in the city every day! (smiles)"... "It's not so scary (smiles)"... "Well, I say...that...that's the kind of school and that it's good for me...better than...where I was." ... "And I say... How can I say it?... Mmmm... yes for those who know a little less... and so on." ... "Well, yes!"... (he is embarrassed when he has to say what kind of school he goes to)(M9)*

*(He tells them that he is now )"In Zagreb at school, at dormitory."...(How is he doing at school in Zagreb?)" I say good, so-so (tak- tak in Croatian)." (M1)*

*Life in the Centre for participants is marked by various emotional challenges- feelings due to the impossibility of wearing your clothes in the Centre; "It was stupid..."(when he is not allowed to wear his clothes around the Centre)... "That's why..I like to be in clothes from home....Because it's prettier!..Yes! ".... "It's ugly!...In everything!"...(the clothes she has to wear)... "Yes!... By everything! By brand!... Yes! And more expensive!...Yes!"...(the clothes are different from his from home)... "Yes!.....No!"...(that's why he doesn't want to wear clothes from the Centre)... "In jeans, sweatpants and t-shirts."...(is usually at home)... "There are.....But they are ugly!...Yes!"... "Yes! Well, I don't wear the whole (week) one, I have others"....(it is important for him to be in clean clothes)... "Yes!"...(brings his clothes from home for the whole week) (M2)*

*Such challenges are especially important in the period of adolescence; "And yes... I felt bad when I couldn't have clothes from home, but I had to change... Into old clothes. (quietly)... Into old clothes, T-shirt, sweatpants, like that." .... "And then I got used to it because I knew if I was in my new clothes they would get dirty, then I would go home smeared (kaljava in Croatian)." (F2)*

*The participants expressed in their statements feelings about staying in the Centre; "Hmmm..I don't know..." (whether he is particularly happy about something in the Centre)... "Ah, I don't know yet, I haven't thought about it at all." (F2)*

Participants have *an attitude towards the return to the Centre after a weekend at home; "No!"... (it is not difficult for him to come back after the weekend)... "Yes!"... (he goes home every weekend) (M5)*

*(M5)*

*"Feeling good... "..." Half past eight, eight, something like that..."..." Happy." (going back to school)... Yes... (why are you happy?)... Just because..." (M14)*

Some of the participants have feelings towards leaving the Centre; *"...happy...just" ... (.when he leaves the Centre).... "Yes." ... (he is looking forward to leaving the Centre).... "That, just to get away from this home for a while because I'm not dying, three years in one dormitory and then three in another..."..." Well, I'm happy about a lot of things. I've already had enough of elementary school, when the eighth grade will end, when the eighth grade will end." (M11)*

### SOCIAL CLIMATE IN THE CENTRE

The participants express a kind of relief from attending the new school because there are no more unpleasant situations- *no physical and verbal abuse* and there is *no mocking by peers;*

*"No!" (in the Centre no one beats him, no one mistreats you, no one curses his mother)...*

*"Yes!" (he thinks he did well in the Centre) (M9)*

*"Yes, yes (nods his head)"... (he went to exercises with a speech therapist).... "No"... (they didn't make fun of him in the new class).... "No! That's where they helped me!" (M6)*

#### 6.1.2.4. The fourth theme is CHARACTERISTICS OF EDUCATION IN THE CENTRE

This theme shows the attitude of the participants towards educational success in the Centre, considering the characteristics of the class that are influenced by the relations of students and educators/teachers and professional associates.

Table 15: Theme *Characteristics of education in the Centre* with sub-themes

CHARACTERISTICS OF EDUCATION IN THE CENTRE	CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CLASS IN THE CENTER
	LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT IN THE CENTRE
	RELATIONS OF STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS/TEACHERS AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATES

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CLASS IN THE CENTER

The participants state that they like the fact that *the classes are smaller*, which makes them more satisfied and pleasant to work; *"Yes, I am very satisfied."*... *"Why? (quietly).... You have nice classrooms, there are few of us in the class, there are not many of us and that. The rooms are great, and everything."*(M5)

#### LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT IN THE CENTRE

They conclude that it is *easier to master material with a special program* which is why he has *the motivation to learn*; *"..a little" (it is a little difficult).... (learning was more difficult) "In the one I was in before..."* (M5)

*(Her best subject is) "Croatian...yes...C (3)" (has a grade)....(In Mathematics her grade is) "D (2)...I love it!" ... "Yes!..crossword puzzles." (she likes tasks from Croatian)..." ... and that adding up.. w.e solving the tasks..." (in Croatian ... "a ono..zbrajanje... a da mi se ....")... "wrii...tt.....to study!"...(loves in the Center) (F1)*

In the Centre, some participants have *good grades and it wasn't difficult to learn*;.. *"All B (4), A (5)..." ( he has grades)(M7)*

*"Yes!...(proudly and loudly)"...(he is doing well in this new school, he can learn everything and is a very good student.)(M5)*

*It contributes to the self-confidence of the participants and perception of greater learning success; "Now I have B(4), A(5), one C(3)."... "Yes."...(the grades in this school have improved)... "I'm..."..(now he is satisfied with it)... "It could, but I don't know exactly how possible it is."( can the grades get any better) (M7)*

*Some participants created an attitude towards own school success and specific subjects;*

*"Aha... yes... Math... yes..." (she likes that she has to study a lot she likes mathematics)....*

*"No... no... yes."... (she is not afraid of Mathematics)... " It is not ...we study 1 and 1 plus 1..." (not boring in Mathematics)... "A (5).... yes, from Mathematics."..."No, alone."...(solves all tasks)... "Ok... alone...but sometimes I need help" ( for writing homework) (F5)*

*"Fine art..." (she doesn't like that subject).... "Nice, but I don't feel like it"...(she thinks she doesn't draws beautifully).. "Yes"...(she is bored in art) (F5)*

*For other participants coming to the Centre actually led to lack of motivation for learning; "It's not...but I don't feel like working...sometimes..." .... "I don't want to..." .... "It's not... I'm bored, it's always the same... I don't feel like it." (M2)*

*They do not have the impression that it is easy to master the material in the Centre; "No."...(he doesn't think that he reads and studies better now)... "Mm."...(he thinks he's worse in learning)... "It's not! ..."(so easy to learn to read)...." when I study... I won't."... (M1)*

*Part of the participants has a positive attitude towards education in the Centre; (This school he now goes to in the Centre) " ...and I think to myself that I get more difficult assignments, but what... I learned very differently there at school than here and what.. there were new tasks, so I'm used to it now."... " It's different....Math is a bit more difficult than there, I'm used to it, I didn't really study there." "well so so ..." ( there are still differences in schools) "No, everything is normal. Not really, I don't even remember what I had there anymore." (M7)*

*There is a small number of participants who in their statements expressed uncertainty about the level of knowledge for admission to secondary school; "I have no idea, I guess (quietly)"..*



( if he has learned enough to go to secondary school)...." How could I know in advance... yes (sighed)" (M1)

" Enough. ".(learned at the school in the Centre that he can go to secondary school) (M2)

### RELATIONS OF STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS/TEACHERS

As previously shown, some participants expressed that it was easier mastering the materials according to the special program in Centre, which some participants connected with a *positive experience of a teacher*; "Yes...(nods head)... because when we need help, they explain to us, work with us... professor. they work with us, learn, help, we write ourselves, they make sure we get it right and so on... "... "cccc... when we get homework, we write it, and that's it." (F2)

In the statement, it was expressed quite neutrally a *perception of the educator/ teacher*; "Some are, some are not"...(scary teachers at the Center) (M2)

"When I'm in math class, Mr. writes on the board and then gives us those worksheets....- "You have everything on the board and write the worksheets , and I'll review them later"-.... And we write it all down and he checks it for us and puts it correctly."... "If I don't know something, then I raise two fingers and then I call him and then he comes.... Yes (teacher help her)... (Nods her head)" (F2)

"They didn't. (laughs)"...(scary teachers at the Centre) (F3)... "... (no answer)... (laughs)"... (do the teachers yell at them in the Centre) (F3)

One participant expressed strong emotions related to *the teacher's relation to the participant* and connects with memories of the previous school; "Retarded...What?".... "Well nothing...well... come on... (angry)".... "Good. (angry)"....(the teachers behave towards him)... "...toward me...Good! (angry)"... "The same."...(as in the old school) (M1)

The participants emphasize *getting to know the experts on the first day of school*, as the most important memory of coming to the Centre; "Yes!".. Mr. Z, I still remember that... Well, yes.. (laughs).. Yes!"... "So what, he only said what year he was and how the formality was going and so on."... "Yes!" ..(he told him what the class he will attend)... "Yes!".. (he introduced him

*to a classmate at school)...At school, in the group .....at school."...." Mrs. M. She was my class teacher.".... "Good," the class teacher seemed to him.)(M6)*

#### 6.1.2.5. The fifth theme is SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS DURING LIFE IN THE CENTRE

The topic represents some relationships among peers to which the participants gave a specific meaning and which determine the emotional reactions of the participants during the period of life in the Centre.

*Table 16: Theme Social relationships during life in the Centre with sub-themes*

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS DURING LIFE IN THE CENTRE	FRIENDLY AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AT THE CENTRE
	FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIPS OUTSIDE THE CENTRE
	EMOTIONS DUE TO LOSS OF FRIENDS

#### FRIENDLY AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AT THE CENTRE

Participants state that they quickly made new friends after arriving at the Centre- *meeting friends in the centre; "It took a while." (to make some friends) (M4)*

*(on the first day, he liked) "Well, friends" the most".... "Yes." (it seemed to him that they were good friends)... "Yes."(he immediately made some friends)... "Yes."( he made a lot of friends right from the start)(M7)*

The participant stated that he feels *that he had the support of his peers;*

*"Three boys." (in the room. where he sleeps).... "they are good friends to me" ...(they support him in specific situation). "Yeah, like if I have dark thoughts ..then..." (M9)*

When coming to the Centre, it was important for the participants to find new friends and to have someone they could rely on so *friendships have been made;*

*"One girl who looked after me...M. Š.".... "I loved her and called her mom."... "Yes".... (they were very good)..." Then when she left I got used to M and so on... "(F4)*

Some of the participants have various criteria for selecting friends; *"And I had...what...with everyone...."..." "Well, yes. With everyone I hang out with....No!"..(he can talk without any problems/discomfort)... "Of course."...(he also talks about girls) (M1)*

Most often, while in the Centre, participants *made friendships while going out or through sports; "So outside..."(he met his current friends).... "When we played football, did technical training and so on..."... "It's not...Yes"...(he is hanging out with a friend about his age). (M1)*

One participant expressed a *negative attitude toward some friendships from a special institution/ school; "Is he a friend... here in this one... I saw him once when he was with my mother, I have no idea what ... when we were shopping..."... "Well, all of these... all of these (looks disinterestedly out the window)... and all of them... yes!... not all of them, but ... they just stick like plants (in Croatian samo kaj se drže ko biljke)... with who to..." (M1)*

One participant admitted that she had a crush - *sympathies in a special institution; "Please?... No!...(nods her head...)... "Wait until I remember...(she laughs and blushes)....I don't know...(laughs)..... "Oh no!"...(she doesn't know what her crush's name is)... "...And Matija touches (in Croatian - pipa)! (laughs)" .... "Yes! (laughs)...she likes a boy (F1)*

Other participants stated that they have romantic crushes outside the Centre or that they want to have a crush- *maintaining the first love relationships between peers; " I have.... 18...Yes..".... "Three years."... " 01.05. in Maksimir! It is...!!Aha...."..."She wasn't at the match...she lives next to Maksimir!"... "And it...goes...Ma" .... "What's more... a month and something..... 35 days plus... 47..." (M3)*

*"Well, no, I don't have it yet. I don't have it yet..."(looking down)... " Mm.... "... (he broke up with the old girl)... "It will be... It will be. In a cafe... There are as many girls as you want in cafes." (M1)*

Although in the special school, one participant pointed out that he sometimes goes out with his friends from the Centre on weekends - *maintaining friendships from a special institution and*

*going out on weekends; "With M3"... he occasionally goes out... " (no answer)..... We'll talk on the phone...yeah..... And then we'll meet."... "Well, no... it depends, sometimes we go for coffee... sometimes not... we walk..."... With no one (in Croatian Nikime)...ok...with ...his and this one...and her friend. The M3 girlfriend and her friend...."...."And it depends on how I can come out..."(M1)*

Four student expressed that they felt a *relief because of getting to know peers in the new school*:  
*"I met P.K., K.H., K.N.... I met B., S., A,..." .... I wanted to have more company....and more friend"... "I did, yes." (met more friends and peers)... Petra, Antonio and Danijel from the class." (M12)*

Some participant still has *occasional contact with old friends from regular school*: *"Yes! (nods)"... when he come home he sees old friends..... "Good."... talking with old friends.... "Yes, for the last year."... "They didn't..." (ask him what kind of school he is going to)...."Mmmm...(nods head)....No!" ...(they didn't ask him why he didn't come to school one day) (M6)*

*"I rarely, rarely see them now."... "Not anymore" (meets his friends).. "I have a neighbour. Mrs. M is my neighbour. Yes, Uncle B is also there."..."I don't think he has any children, he lives alone." (M6)*

*"Yes...I see"...(a friends from the regular school)..... "On Saturdays."...(they hang out)... "No."...(I don't know which school the girls go to now)... "We go rollerblading...yes"...(around the (neighborhood)...." Still.... A lot..." ... "From school"... (F3)*

Participants also maintain friendly relations with their peers who attend regular schools- *going out with a group of friends*;

*"I have... Ivan and Darko."... "I mostly go out with my friends, and then they go out with us... Karla and Teo."... "They are eighth graders like me."... "They are going... I don't know where they said, I forgot."..." They will go to secondary school... Gymnasium." (F2)*

The change of school and moving to the Centre for the participants was also marked by a change of place of residence, which is why most of them mentioned a *lack of contact with peers from the old school due to living in different parts of the city*:

*"A little yes." (he misses his friends from his old school)... "Well, poorly, most of them are now in secondary school. I don't know now... they have already finished elementary school."... "From that other school, not really. I saw it a couple of times...some. Yes, from the last school, when I went from the first to the fourth grade, I used to see some...I don't know... And these others, from the fifth grade, I hardly even saw them afterwards, because they were all from the city, from of all neighbourhoods, so I didn't really...I came...I only stayed for a few months...I came in the second semester."(M8)*

*„No."..(when he comes home, he doesn't meet any of his friends from his old school, in another Centre.)... "I met D. Š. before, he was in (another Centre), he lives there somewhere near, I don't know, I forgot, I don't know where he lives... P\*(part of the town)."... "They are."..(his friends from old school are also now finishing eighth grade)... "D. Š. went to class with me... Eighth grade, he's in S\*(name of school)... Yes..."(M7)*

Several participants emphasized the importance and good feeling of being accepted by their friends from their previous school, regardless of whether they now go to a special school-  
*acceptance by old friends from regular school;*

*"Friends from former school. But that was before I was in the fifth grade...they were in the eighth grade."... "Yes."...(his friend is older than him).... "Mmmm...No."..(he doesn't meet friends from his former class)... "Yes!"... (his friends ask him what kind of school he is in and how he is doing there)... "No!"...(his friends don't make fun of him because of school)... "Because they are my friends... and everything.".(M9)*

Participants, more often female participant, express that they miss their friends from previous school and feel sadness because of leaving a friend - *emotions due to loss of friends;*

*"To her old."...(school she would rather be)... "Yes."...(she thinks she would learn more there)...." Because of friends...Yes.."...(she prefers the old school). (F3)*

### 6.1.2.6. The six theme is FAMILY CONTEXT

Table 17: Theme *Family context* with sub-themes

FAMILY CONTEXT	RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRIMARY FAMILY AND WITHIN THE PRIMARY FAMILY
	BEHAVIOUR AT HOME
	FOSTER FAMILY/GUARDIANS

Although this theme contains 3 specific subthemes, only significant subtheme for answering the research questions is *Behaviour at home*.

### BEHAVIOUR AT HOME

In their statements, the participant's describe relationships and express various situations that happen in the family or how they spend time at home (over the weekend or school holidays)-  
*situation at home;*

„We have chickens...Yes.”...(at home).... "I don't have." (other animals at home)... "No."...(his family does not sow or plant anything)... "We don't have....No.."...(any jobs around the house).  
(M2)

„Good.”...(looks like his weekend at home)... "I fool around...to have fun ...I'm joking with someone...so what“ (in Croatian : “Zajebavam se...zezam se ..zaje\*\* se...kaj... “).. “ The old men is at home“ ... "Well, they work, but they also work when I sometimes come in the afternoon.... So I'm going, that's why .. in the afternoon!! ..to see them when I get home..."(M1)

Regarding *activities and obligations at home* a smaller number of participants stated that they have some tasks at home and over the weekend they have slightly different rules to apply;

“Then I get up at 7, 6 o'clock. To feed the pigs and so on.”.... "Yes."...(he works at home)... "I feed pigs, chickens, etc."..." Rabbit, dogs and cats and so on." (his task is to feed the animals).  
..." I decided on my own.... Then they said, come on, do that job, I see that no one takes care of them when I'm at home, then only me takes care of them...".... "Yes..." (that suits him to decide for himself which tasks he will do at home) (M11)

At home and in the family, *flexible upbringing* is evidently present at home and in the family because parents allow different things;

"Yes!... They let me!.... "Let me smoke!.... "Yes. The same thing... the old man says that you can be hiding or not... you can't explain that to anyone.."... "Yes!"...(together with parents).... "Yes!"...(both parents smoke). (M3)

.. "Yes."... (he is going out over the weekend)... "To Samobor (laughs).....To a cafe and so on... to a night club... (laughs)... "Yes! "(he is going out for real) ...(he comes home) "About... and it depends on how and what time, how I like it..."... "And I do have company, and I go out alone sometimes.... Sometimes I know around 11:15pm ...the last time she let me go (meaning mother), sometimes I come home next day...the third day..."(M9)

.. "Around 4 am....Mmm" ..(he comes home)... "At two in the afternoon...Yes..." (he wakes up)... "So he asks, but then mom wakes me up..." ... "Sometimes yes, sometimes no....If I'm good and so on..."... "Yes!..Yes" (that's his reward, to smoke in the house)... "Yes!..In the house!" (he is allowed to smoke). (M2)

Two participants stated that their parents knew that they smoke- *Dad tolerates smoking*; „Yes.."(.at home they know he smokes).. "Dad." (knows that he smokes cigarettes)...Who buys?...Dad..."... "With dad."...(he is allowed to smoke). (M2)

However, *some boundaries must not be crossed*;

"Well, I can do whatever I want, nothing is forbidden to me... well, I'm not allowed to smoke, that's all. Don't even drink in front of dad."... "I can do a little, I just can't drink or smoke in front of my dad."... "Well, I don't really drink, but I smoke, yes."....(he has a smoking habit)"Always, and so on. Well, morning."(M7)

### 6.1.3. Perceptions of the life experience of the adolescents with disabilities in the period of life after completing their education at the Centre

In the text that follows, individual themes for the *period of life after completing their education at the Centre* are presented in more detail giving the answers to research questions. As with the previous periods, due to the large number of codes that appear in the processing of the results, codes that suggest the answers to the research questions will be shown in more detail. A complete table of themes and sub-themes can be found in the Appendix 7.

#### 6.1.3.1. The first theme is *THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE*

Table 18: Theme *Thinking about the future*

<b>THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE</b>	REFLECTION ON PRIVATE LIFE
	THINKING ABOUT PROFESSIONAL LIFE

This first topic reflects adolescents with disabilities' perceptions of life after completing their education at the Centre, revealing their understanding and expectations for the future. In their statements, participants divided their wishes and desires about the immediate future, into ideas about private life and expectations related to professional education/ life.

#### *REFLECTION ON PRIVATE LIFE*

Thinking about the future for a few participants meant thinking about the *possibility of founding their own family*:

*"I will. (laughs)"...(found his family)... "I will (laughs)"... (plans to get married)... " I will..(laughs)"...(plan to have children)..."I have no idea, how it happens... How it happens..."...*

*"Yes!"...(he will have a girlfriend and children)... "I don't know. "... (will they have a big wedding (M1)*



*"I would live alone."... "I wouldn't like to have children yet...."... "I would (laughs)...(like to find a boyfriend).. "It wouldn't be (laughs)"...(bad idea to fall in love).. "Yes.. (would like to have children someday)..." Yes...Happy" (F2)*

Female participants gave more specific answers to the questions about *the possibility of marriage*:

*Yes....yes.. "... (she plans to have her own family, to get married)... " Yes.... Two." (children)... "When I finish....yes".. (she will get married).... "Good."...(must be her husband)... (she just laughs...there is no answer.. to the question How her husband will look like?) ... "That he has... hair like a hedgehog. ...laughing... Tall. Skinny. Blue (eyes)...smiles."... "I don't know...I don't know yet"...(where they will live)... "Flat."...(she would like to have). (F3)*

Male participants did not attach much importance to *the possibility of getting married*:

*"It won't be...nothing!".... "Yes..... Later, at the age of 20, 30....."... "Yes... Well, not with that much, but with 20, 30 years, yes." (M2)*

*"I have no idea."...(will he get married one day)... "Well, I will, but that...ask...I don't have any idea."... "And maybe.".... "Well, where the night taking me.., no idea (in Croatian: "pitaj boga" ...)..."Where the night takes you, I don't know." (M3)*

Some participants *plan their lives* very specifically right after graduating secondary school:

*"At home... Well, as a plumber."...." Well, I'll go to work right away."..5. "Yes!"..(first he has to find a job)... "First I'll stay with my dad until I get the money and then I'll buy a house for myself."... "I will build!"...(a house) (M2)*

*"I would work in a restaurant,,,I would have my own business..."... "Good."...(would be a salary)... "Every day I would go to and from work and that's it."... ""I would probably find an apartment for myself...." (F2)*

The participants know what they would like to do and how they would like to spend their time – *wants to learn to drive*:

*"Well, the new one... what... it's good..."... "Yes!"...( he wants to take the driving test)... "That's what the old man told me that he would pay for it... And I will go!"... "Aha."..(he is looking*

*forward to driving the family's new car)... "At seventeen...how many ..I have to wait two more years...and I pass...at eighteen I get a driver's license." (M3)*

In the case of a female participant- *wants to have a hobby and a happy life:*

*"I would.... Watch the series .... go out with my colleagues...".... "Yes. I would go to training... Sports, basketball." ... "I'm not"...(scared)..." Yes. "... (she can make it all happen) (F2)*

Other participants do not attach importance to *planning life after finishing secondary school:*  
*..(exhaled deeply...)... And I know, but... now I don't know... Somewhere they sneaked onto the ship as a cook and so..."... "I can sneak around...there's this one woman...I can sneak around...but what exactly would I do...I have no idea ..." (M3)*

### THINKING ABOUT PROFESSIONAL LIFE

When we talk about thinking about professional life, some participants are sure that they have already arranged everything in advance- *to get a job in the profession:\_"Yes!"...(he already knows a craftsman he could work for when he finishes secondary school)... "Yes!"...(he already talked to that craftsman about the job) (M2)*

The situation is similar with searching and finding work- *search and get a job:*

*"Mm."...(he thinks he will be able to find a job)...." Mm .....Well at Hanža's..... At Hanžek's... he does have a company...a lot..... That's the name of the company..."... "Well, nice... Well, there's a boy who hangs out with him, he's .. as far as I know... uncle..."... "Yes."...(he thinks it's good practice for him)... "Yes."... (there he will learn everything he needs to know ) (M1)*

The *positive perspective of the future after graduating secondary school* is not always completely like that and depends on various factors:

*When I finish secondary school? ...I will get a job."... (One student) said that it is difficult to get a job in (another Centre)... Well, it is difficult to get a job".... "Yes."...(he hangs out with older boys from the Centre)... "That's what he told me"... "Well, I don't know. Well, it's hard to get a job."... "Who will find me a job?...And how much will I be paid?"(M7)*

*"Nothing! I will always do something... what... I can work now, but I won't... what... And I got an offer to go to the seaside with my godfather... but I don't feel like it.. .." (M3)*

*"The old lady says to me- "Go to Catering (school)... what (kaj in Croatian)... it's better for you than going to... what... for a mechanic, you don't have a job, the same for a tinsmith... what now (kaj sad in Croatian)... someone will crash once a year, you don't have an electrician, that's a hard school for you, you don't even have subject electricity... an electrician... And what (kaj in Croatian), go to become a chef, that's the best thing yet... they pack what's left at home (they pack what food is left for you to take home).. and what now... well, go to the restaurateurs, that's the best for you..." (M3)*

Due to various factors in the participants' statements, a *negative perspective of the future after graduating from secondary school* emerged:

*"In secondary school?... Okay, then I did....fuck it... I would have gone to traffic school and I could have gone to traffic school! Kaj, I would pass... would pass the seventh with four, would try the eighth with four and what... I would go to Traffic school ... "... "Driver...I would go on to become a bus driver and later enrol in the Police Academy." .... "Yes. I didn't have a dream, but I had the desire to go, but here it is... "...."What shall I do now!? Yes...What (kaj in Croatian), I told this one at the orientation, what (kaj in Croatian), that I wish to go to Traffic school, he says, "We will make an agreement with (social worker)". And what, (social worker) came aandd... everything is confused... what... he says "I don't agree". Well then...come on.... The dude doesn't agree!!..fuck...come on..." (M3)*

*"I would!"..(he would like to stay in his old primary school)... "I would."...(go from home to school)... "I am...for an auto electrician"...(he planned to study for another profession) (M2)*

### 6.1.3.2. The second theme is CHOOSING AN OCCUPATION

The second theme of the period after completing their education at the Centre the contains four sub-themes and shows the viewpoints and emotional reactions of the participants as well as some factors that had an influence in choosing the profession for which they will continue their education in secondary school.

Table 19: Theme *Choosing an occupation* with sub-themes

<b>CHOOSING AN OCCUPATION</b>	POSSIBILITIES OF CHOOSING A FUTURE OCCUPATION
	DETERMINANTS OF CHOOSING A FUTURE OCCUPATION
	EMOTIONAL REACTIONS RELATED TO CHOOSING A FUTURE OCCUPATION
	AWARENESS ABOUT THE FUTURE OCCUPATION

### POSSIBILITIES OF CHOOSING A FUTURE OCCUPATION

The possibility of choosing a future occupation depended on each individual participant. Some participants stated that the *choice of the future occupation* was made *at the suggestion of others because he didn't have other option*:

"Yes, when I have that one school left...which I liked. " .... "When I don't have it anywhere else and I wouldn't like it." ... " And the social and so on...(he had to decide regarding the school..)  
"Yes" (in the Centre)... "Yes." ...(she immediately agreed with that)... "For a co-painter, yes.  
" (he will go for that job) (M11)

One participant stated that *someone proposed to him future occupation*:

"In (another Centre)...." (he will go to secondary school)... "Gardener..."... "Yes. That's what they suggested.....a little physical work..." (M6)

The *choice of the future occupation* was made *at the proposal of the Court*: "I know! Well, look, this one... even if I'm not going to get an education, and the court knows that... I have nothing to do with it anymore.... What would you have? Come on, tell me... what?!" ... "What kind?... And that judge is lying...fuck it!" (M3)

Only three participants stated that has *chosen a future occupation by himself/ herself* and that they participated in the decision to choose an occupation:

*"I chose it myself" (M12) and that he/ she likes the chosen occupation: "Yes."..(he is now in the eighth grade)... "Yes".(he will go to secondary school)... "I'm going to (another Centre) to be a self-painting artist." .... "I will." (continue school until he finishes it)... "Yes.*

*Wherever you go, there are all kinds of people... Well, that's good for me. Whoever causes problems, so be it." (M11)*

*"I had a big meeting (kazuističku sjednicu in Croatian) about continuing my education... There were parents, social workers, it was held in (name of the room), they asked me where I would continue my education and I told them where I would be." (M12).*

Related to choosing a future occupation, most participants express emotional reactions depending on their satisfaction with the future occupation. Most of them would like that decision about their future occupation is different - *emotional reactions related to choosing future occupation:*

*I don't know that to you (exhaled loudly)... . I said that I would go for a chef, and that profession.... I don't know... for which one..." "I don't want to go to (another Centre), what (kaj in Croatian)! Stay here as I am ... I'd rather stay here for secondary school... if I will go... "... "Look, I don't have to go to (another Centre) at all! I don't even have to go to (secondary school)! They put me in (another Centre) and I won't even go to school...so what!... Next year I will enroll in this one, I can enroll in (secondary school)... " (M3)*

*"Would (quietly)... " (like that it is different)... "I would!"..( he would like he had stayed in the old school)... "I would." (he would go to a different secondary school)... "I am... For an auto electrician..." "I failed the class and had to come here." (M2)*

*"In (secondary school), what (kaj in Croatian)! (angry)"... "For the cook.... what about waiter.... Yes..." "I wouldn't....I don't want..."..(to go to school for an auto mechanic)... "I know all that, I've been working with my old man since I was eight years old...that...we help, what,..." (M3)*

Other participants expressed *the desire to attend secondary school for supporting occupations*:  
*"For a plumber." ... (he will study in secondary school) ... "I am." ... (he is satisfied with the school he will go to) ... "In (secondary school)." ... (will go to secondary school) ... "At (secondary school) ... " ... (will live in a dorm) ... "Yes!" ... (that's fine with him) (M2)*

*„Yes! (loud and happy)“ ... (he is ready for secondary school) ... "I'm looking forward to...Everything..." .... "I don't know." ... what can be expected on the first day of secondary school. “... "Yes!" (he looks forward more than he is afraid). (M5)*

The participants made a *firm decision about the future occupation*:

*Yes. “.. (he wants to go to secondary school) ... "Well, I won't either, I don't feel like it either, but I'm going to finish secondary school...yes (angry)" ... "Not to end badly....he's so...fu\*\*...oh no, bum .. that laziness .. is... like..." ... " Work.. fu\*\* (quietly).. I'd rather not go to school... (laughs)." (M1)*

*"Painting, I prefer to do that." ... "I am." ... (he is satisfied with his choice of occupation) ... "Well nothing (Niš in Croatian), when I said -painter, I'm quite satisfied with that." ... "And I like to be outside, but I don't like to be like now...this is what I say for now ...a painter, more a master." (M11)*

### DETERMINANTS OF CHOOSING A FUTURE OCCUPATION

For the participants, when choosing a profession, an important determinant was the *prospect of a job that can make good money*: *"Yes!" ... (he thinks he can make good money) ... “ Saving!...For the house...Yes!” (M2).*

*"It will... It will.... my job will bring me a lot of money .”(M1)*

All participants had to pass a testing to choose a suitable future occupation (professional orientation), and for enrolment in secondary school- *testing for admission to secondary school (Examination for secondary school).* *"... We didn't have...we had tests, when, in the tenth, the eleventh month when there was, this recruitment..." .... " I don't know, I'm nothing... when I solved it, I just left." ... "No. " ... (no one told him anything about it). (M11)*

In this subcategory, there are also codes related to the feelings about the choice of future occupation that participants expressed, in order to choose a future occupation, among which are *satisfaction and positive emotions related to the future occupation*:

"Why?... I didn't." ..(disappointed )... "And I don't care, now I will see what the final decision will be. It has to be done either this week or next week. And maybe my Old lady (meaning mother) was already .. I don't know..."... "Why would I be angry, no matter what... Angry? No, I'm not angry."... "I am...I am...not to mention...I am angry..."(M3)

Within the framework of the information at their disposal, the participants are not in general fully satisfied with the *perspective of the future occupation that they wanted*:

"I would!"..( he would like to stay in the old school)... "I would." (he would certainly go to a different secondary school)... "I am... For an auto electrician..."... "I failed the class and had to come here." (M2)

"I was thinking of being a plumber, but in the end, I'm going to be an auto mechanic" .... "To (another Centre)..."... "Yes!" .. (he is going to school for an auto mechanic). (M9)

However, some participants expressed *positive emotions regarding the future occupation and satisfaction with the choice of occupation*: "I am. " (he is satisfied with his future occupation) ... "Cheerful ... I chose it myself..."... „Yes!“ ....(he is happy that he will go to secondary school)... "I'm looking forward to it."... "I'm not. ".(not afraid at all of secondary school) (M12)

"No, what would you be afraid of? I'm looking forward to it! Let me end this madness and to say bye!"... "I'm not afraid at all! If I were scared, have, he would hit me ...."

"Yes!"...(he is looking forward to secondary school.)... "No, not even, because I was already on a visit.....Yes!" .... "No!"..(he is not afraid of secondary school)... "And so, excited" (about going to a new school)... "Yes!"...he is excited about the new school. (M9)

In their statements, the participants comment on the *perspective of their future occupation as a good base for learning different skills and knowledge*:



"... Yes!.. In everything.. "( thinks that the knowledge he acquired in secondary school will help him in life)... "If I use it... Well with everything..... Well, nice." .... "Yes!"... (thinks he can make good money). (M2)

"How will it be..?"... "Maybe the first time we come there it will be a little awkward..... Until I get used to it." ... "Yes."..( maybe he is a little curious)...No, only that I will be a little excited, the first day what my class will be like, where I will have to go, what class..."(M11)

" About what awaits me..."... I'm just a little excited, nothing else... I hope so....(to be all right. )(M11)

### AWARENESS ABOUT THE FUTURE OCCUPATION

According to the total received statements on questions related to awareness about future occupations, three groups of statements can be grouped.

Depending on the information they have about their future occupation, first, it can be concluded that not all of them have enough information - *insufficient knowledge of the scope of their future occupation and education in secondary vocational school*:

"I haven't"..(any idea what he will study in secondary school).... "I don't have."...(information about his occupation).... "Repairing...mmm... putting pipes, radiators ... changing these valves..." (M2)

"I think yees... why, I have no idea what occupations are there, but..."... "Ah... I don't know!"...what awaits him) (M3)

When the participants were asked about their knowledge of the jobs of their future occupation, they indicated - *partial knowledge of the scope of work of future occupation (as a assistant cook and a pastry maker, assistant plumber, assistant auto mechanic, assistant floor installer):* ...“(there is no answer)..“(question: What will you learn in secondary school?)... "Making cakes...Cooking."... "Spaghetti...I know"... "(no answer)"...(question: What would you like to learn in secondary school?)... "Rice....I know".. "Sarma...."...(likes to eat).... "Yes."...(she would like to learn to cook the dishes she likes to eat). (F3)



*"How much sugar,...how much chocolate...flour, for example....Eggs, onions..."... "No, potatoes and... Salads..." .... "They said half how to cook, half to make dessert."... "Making cakes" (prefer the part) ... "In the kitchen."... "I love... Everything..."(likes to work in the kitchen)..." Spaghetti.... Bolognese."... "Yes, that's great for me, I eat it at home." (F2)*

*"What about internship?.... Mmm.. I'll go... So yes..."... "Aha..... Well, everything...is..., the plumber installs...pipes.....when someone calls..." .... "It depends... Well, I won't go alone....is...(stretches)"... "Well, they will teach me!.... What do I know (quietly)..."... "We will study in the first year at school... Well, on an internship at school. It's the first year is at school...."... "I don't know either..." (where he will later go to practice). (M1)*

Also, the participants express awareness of lack of knowledge about future occupation and lack of skills for future occupation:

*"And I only know how to cook one thing....Coffee."... "Well, I like sweet, and I also know how to make it bitter, without sugar."... "And I don't know how to cook ... at least until I learn..."(M7)*

*Well, he's fixing ..the car.".. "No! (laughs)...the body technician doesn't put cars together... Rather, he repairs the bodywork..."... "sheet metal!....Mmmm...(laughs)"... "No, (laughs) there are machines... and when they bend that sheet, then they have to screw it up and so on, straighten it and everything.".... "I don't really know everything." (M9)*

*"Installs parquet floors."... "I don't know...(very quietly)..." (what tool he needs)... "Drvo fix (wood glue) ....(quietly)... Well.....aaa... (shakes head)..." .... "Yes." ...(he has a lot of learning ahead of him in secondary school). (M5)."*

*"No."...(he never saw how a parquet man works)... "Yes."...(he will have to learn everything about that occupation.)... " And a saw and that's all.....I have no idea..."... "No...oh dear..." (he doesn't know what tools a parquet worker uses). (M4)*

Further statements show that the participants are informed about their future occupation:

*"...,(he nods his head).... Plant flowers, carrots, things like that. Aa agriculture..."... "Yes!"...(jobs in agriculture)... "...Hoe, rake, ..."... "Yes, when I go to the field, I have a tractor and that, a plow and a disc harrow." .... "Yes!"...(he does that at home)... "Yes!"...(when he is at*

*home for the weekend, he works in the field)... "I dig corn when needed."... "Yes!" (he has a field at home)... "Cows and cattle.... Yes!" (M6)*

*"So they cook... then they cook, they clean up after themselves... aaa... and so, I don't know what else...."*

*In his profession, he will also use appliances... "So that the appliance helps him make coffee and so on.... And the fridge so he can freeze something." ... (M7)*

### 6.1.3.3. The third theme is CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

Although this theme contains 6 specific subthemes, the only significant codes for answering the research questions are discussed in detail.

Table 20: Theme *Characteristics of the transition to secondary school*

<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL</b>	EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO SECONDARY SCHOOL
	FAMILY REACTIONS TO SECONDARY SCHOOL
	SELF-AWARENESS
	EXPECTATIONS REGARDING SECONDARY SCHOOL
	ACCOMMODATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOL
	OTHER

### EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

The participants stated different emotional reactions related to secondary school, both their own emotions and thoughts - *joy, fear and excitement about going to vocational school:*

*"Yes..." (maybe he is a little curious)... "No, only that I will be a little excited, the first day what my class will be like, where I will have to go, in which class..." "I'm just a little excited, nothing else. "... "I hope so." (.to be all right). (M11)*

"No!"...(afraid of secondary school)... "It's not...no!" ..(fear of the teacher's in the new school)..." And so, excited" (about going to a new school)... "Yes!"...(excited about the new school.)... "No!" (can imagine what the first day of school will look like)... "I'm not...no! (afraid)" (M9)

Some participants expressed joy and positive feelings associated with secondary school in their statements: "Well, both."( happy, but also afraid of secondary school)..." Well, because it's closer to home and I'll go home every day."(looking forward to secondary school) (M7)

Also present in the statements are feelings of fear, discomfort and uncertainty about going to vocational school:

"Oh no, fu\*\* it,...I say to mom, tell me that I'm sick,...come on...I won't..." "A-a-...No...before."...(the parents don't want to justify his absences)... "A-a. ..well, if I had my way..., I would have given up....yes..." (from secondary school)... "Yes. "... (would give up)..."Well, I won't fight with my dad...I won't come home...kill old men.....fu\*\*...fu\*\*....my old men are strong..." (M1)

"Because maybe someone will make fun of me in (another Centre), maybe there will be bad teachers, strict, maybe I will fail the class, I don't know."... "Yes."...(anything can happen in secondary school)... "The question is if I feel like studying."... "Yes." ..(getting good grades shouldn't be a problem in secondary school).(M7)

"Well, yes, I say, little one... the difficult one, the advanced one..." "Not that... but that, advanced, I don't know, like, writing and that... For example, if we have exams now, what will they ask me? .. "... "A bit..."(afraid)... "And it will be! I guess he will! I doubt it!"..."The question is how we will behave..." "No! The same, medium, because now I know what this guy (meaning teacher) will ask me."..."...I think I will!" (finish secondary school) ... (keeps quiet for a while.)...And I will try my best!"... "I don't know, I think... well, I don't know, it will be... and maybe something will be, something... For example, mathematics will not be easy."... "No!"( not afraid of any other subject) (M6)

Participants express their feelings regarding the perspective of future education and positive attitude towards future knowledge and skills:

"Yes!".( wants to finish secondary school)...*"I don't know."* ( how will it be in secondary school)... *"Study... well..."* (M5)

*"Yes!"*(would like to find a good job after secondary school)... *"Yes."*...(earn something with his work)... *"Well, I will save for food."*...*"For everyone"* (And for his parents)... (Nods his head)  
(M5)

Two participants clearly state feelings of dissatisfaction due to unchanging life perspective:  
*"Um... Well, in a regular school, it would be possible... it would be better because we would have a bigger school... then because you can go to college, and here you can't go to college like that."* (M10)

*When I finish secondary school? ...I will get a job."*... (One student) said that it is difficult to get a job in (another Centre)... *Well, it is difficult to get a job".... "Yes."*...(he hangs out with older boys from the Centre)...*"That's what he told me"*... *"Well, I don't know. Well, it's hard to get a job."*... *"Who will find me a job?...And how much will I be paid?"*(M7)

Characteristics of the transition to secondary school for one participant mean returning home, which makes him very happy because he didn't continue education in secondary school- joy about going to a new school:

*"...(no answer)...Have fun, socialize and so on"* (when he finishes school....At home...Yes"...  
*"...dig the garden"..."We have.... Strawberries... What's it called... salads..."*... *"Aha....Yes"*  
(likes to work in the garden and looking forward ...*"All kinds of things... Chopping wood... Hauling wood."* (helps dad at home)...All kinds of things... (no answer...long pause)." ...  
*"Happy...right"* (about going home) (M14)

### FAMILY REACTIONS TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

As a specificity of this topic, characteristics of the transition to secondary school, are also family reactions to secondary school. The participants stated different reactions of their families/parents- *parents' feelings regarding the perspective of future education*

*"Well, it doesn't agree.. fu\*\*... what! (angry) Well, good morning, it doesn't agree!" ... " Well, in (another Centre), what!" ... "Yes, what else?!... the judge is more important... fu\*\*... he sends the other one... well, he can't do that... he can't understand something... today he is arranging something, dude, he says "He won't go to (another Centre), (another Centre) won't go, you should make sure he goes to (another Centre)". ..and well...the old lady says "Good". ..that said it all...that's it. The old lady said that she would go to (another Centre)..." (M3)*

Most of the participants expressed *parents' attitude toward the student and future education* and is mostly present- *supportive attitude of the family toward the student and future education*:  
*"Yes."..(mom and dad want him to go to secondary school)... "Yes."..(the parents are satisfied with the profession).(M4)*

*"I did... And everyone is looking forward to it..." ... "Yes."..(he loves his future job). (M7)*

It is evident from the statements that *the family and the extended family are satisfied with the enrolment in secondary school and with the continuation of education for the adolescent with disabilities*:

*"Well, aunt, uncle, cousin, his girlfriend, cousin and so on.." ... "Yes."... (everyone is happy that he is going to be a cook) (M7).*

*"Yes, they agree where I'm going.....Yes!" (M2)*

*" Yes....Yes".."(mom is happy that she is going to be a cook)... "Yes....Yes"...( she and her sister help mom at home)... "Cleaning." ... (F3)*

*.. "Yes!" ... (question: Are your parents happy with the choice of secondary school?)... " Yes... "Because my brother knows a lot of friends now and those who stay, ....it's easier for them (meaning parents) right away. ...And so..." (M6)*

### SELF-AWARENESS

This subtheme refers mainly to the feelings of the participants, related to continuing education and enrolment in secondary school. The participants have many *expectations for the future new (secondary) school* as well as they see more possibilities:

"Good." ..(will be in secondary school)... "( no answer)"...question: Do you expect anything in secondary school?)... "I want...yeah.....To be a plumber..." (M1)

" Yes!" .. (going to school for a body technician)... "Because they only have fourth grade there, because I will go to fourth grade as well."... "Well, don't want to be a helper!"... "Yes!" (.that you can work).... "Yes!" (satisfied with that decision and the interest of the body technician)... "Yes!" (satisfied with the decision on further education.) (M9)

"Well, because as soon as I finish secondary school and I'm at peace! "... "To be able to go to work." .... "Then I will go with my brother to Germany."... "Yes!" (everything is already planned)... "Yes!" (plans to get a job)... "So that I have bread... for clothes and for everything!"... "Now ..until ..until I finish secondary school yes." ..(M9)

One of the participants expressed strong feelings of uncertainty in their abilities: "A-a. ..well, if I had my way..., I would have given up....yes..." (from secondary school)... "Yes. "... (would give up)... "Well, I won't fight with my dad...I won't come home...kill old men....fu\*\*...fu\*\*....my old men are strong..." (M1)

"I don't know...(quietly)" (what will happen if he fails to finish secondary school)... "...I don't know...I don't know" ..(what could be the reason for not finishing secondary school)... "Yes..." (he decided to finish school)... "Yes." ..(to get a good job)... "Yes."...(he likes such a plan)... Yes." ..(ready to study for the job of a parquet layer)...(M4)

Participants connected their feelings and confidence in their abilities to be successful and to make sure to finish secondary school: "I will be able to!...Yes"...(to get organised and come to school on time)... "Well, I won't!"...(be late for school). (M2)

"I said "maybe" to be!...Maybe"!..what..."...(rich one day) (M3)

Although they will be in a new school, the participants are very aware of the possible consequences of inappropriate behaviour: "Aha."...(there could be problems if he is lazy) (M2)  
"It's for behaviour, why... not for learning... for behaviour! They think...they think I'm going to mark again, I guess that's all... again that I'm...that social...is..." (M3)

Participants have undefined *expectations regarding secondary school* or again do not know what to expect in secondary school at all - *no expectations for the future vocational school*:

*"All kinds of things are waiting for me..." (in secondary school).... "The rules await me just like here."... "Even in elementary school. "... "That, just to get away from this dormitory for a while because I can't do it anymore, three years in Centre for Education and three in (another Centre)..." (M11)*

*"It's not....Yes.." , (is afraid of going to secondary school)... "I don't know."... (what awaits her in secondary school) (F3)*

The participants expect that they will *they master the material more easily with a special program*:

*"Easier.".. (will be in secondary school)... "I will go home every day. (laughs)... I will go home every day... (stretches)"... "I don't know..I don't know..(loud and nervous)..how will it be with reading and writing"... "I didn't, but I don't know, why... Why are you asking me something as soon as possible in hindsight... Well, I don't know... how will it go..."... "Nice.... Well, I did, but..."... (thought about secondary school) (M1)*

It will also be easier to *complete the obligations in secondary school*:

*"Well I did... Okay, it will be better than here. (he says very boldly)... "Yes, there are better girls and everything. I go home every day, as soon as school ends I go home, what are you waiting for?"... "So what? When you get home you solve them. So you are free again..."... "Yes. Well, I won't be doing alone, sometimes the old lady and old man (meaning parents ), sometimes my sister and... brother... Well, of course...".... "Well, they will have, what won't they. I won't get a ton of homework. (quietly)... I won't get homework that you have to write for five hours... yes.." (M1)*

### ACCOMMODATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

The issue of going to secondary school for the participants entails the issue of providing accommodation, for participants who have specific family situations or need accommodation due to the distance from the secondary school.

Depending on the situation, the participants will either stay at the Centre *or another similar Centre*:



*"It doesn't make me happy, I'm used to it (to be here). My caretaker is pushing me further to the Centre, but I'm not happy about that."... "I agree, but the social worker annoys me a little because she pushes me, and bothers me."... "I would prefer to stay here."... "I'm used to it now."... "That's how life is, that's how they decided the accommodation." (M11)*

There is a possibility that adolescents with disabilities will be *accommodated at home*:  
*"I'll go from home."... "Yes!" ... (will travel every day from home).... "Oh no!".. ( won't be difficult)... "Nothing!" (will not be difficult for him)... "Yes!".. (will write his homework alone at home)..." At home!.. (will write his homework)..."And so, excited" (about going to a new school)... "Yes!"... (excited about the new school). (M9)*

Other participants will come to the Centre only to do homework and to have help with studying. Each situation is individual for the participants, which they accept in different ways: *"I will come here to write my homework and to study, and then I will go home."... "Yes!" ....I will travel." (to the secondary school every day). (M5)*

*"Yes."... (will go from home to secondary school)... "I will go to the Centre to do my homework, and have lunch and then go home." (M7)*

*"I have to see my dad in the hospital first, then I'll go to where we found accommodation."... "Stay there."... "The hospital is close there, my dad is there..."... "I am happy because I will go to Vinkovci, near the hospital, and I will visit my dad there." (M14)*

### OTHER

This subtheme shows some relationships expressed by the participants regarding secondary school, but they could not be grouped into previous themes.

The statements show *joy about the end of the school year* and knowledge of information about the future secondary school- *information about school subjects* *"We sleep in "the library" (name of the room)...now on Friday we have a graduation lunch."... "We will dance a little. We have already agreed" .... "We are. But we need someone who will tune in, someone touched... you know what he plays, DJ...."... "He messed something up...it won't play it anymore..." (M14)*



*"What will we learn? .. What subjects?... Croatian, Mathematics, Politics and Economy I mean, not.... What would it matter?... What should they study...that practice and let me see ..."..." And how... I really don't know what we will study."..." Well, I think so." (will learn how to mix colours and what types there are, tools for the job) (M11).*

#### 6.1.3.4. The fourth theme is CHARACTERISTICS OF DEPARTURE FROM THE CENTRE

The fourth theme contains three sub-themes that characterize and present leaving from the Centre

Table 21: Theme *Characteristics of departure from the Centre*

<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF DEPARTURE FROM THE CENTRE</b>	EMOTIONAL REACTIONS ON LEAVING THE CENTRE
	MEMORIES OF EVENTS FROM THE CENTER
	NEW ACCOMMODATION

#### EMOTIONAL REACTIONS ON LEAVING THE CENTRE

This subtheme is characterized by statements in which the participants express their attitudes and *emotions about leaving the Centre* and ending their education- *feelings about leaving a special institution*:

*"Yes."...(thinks that he will be better in another Centre)... "Because I will already have company there."... "Well, it won't be all these... and these..."... "Well, the whole, but not the second year." (M2)*

The statements in which they express their *feelings related to leaving the institution in which they are now placed* also differ:

*"Well, I don't want to...the same...it's on my way...I'd rather stay....I won't even go to secondary school!....I'd rather...I'd rather stay than go there. ..go to secondary school and stay over the week and go home....Oh, I can totally go! (angry) ("Ma hoću ti ić!" in Croatian)" (M3)*

*"That, just to get away from this dormitory for a while because I can't do it anymore, three years in Centre for Education and three in (another Centre)... "Well, I'm happy about a lot of things. I've already had enough of elementary school, when the eighth grade, when the eighth grade will end." (M11)*

*"...(no answer)...Have fun, socialize and so on" (when he finishes school)... ". Happy....Yes... Right."..(when leaves the Centre)... "Yes."...( happy that he has finished his education at the Centre) (M14)*

Some participants expressed *satisfaction about leaving the Centre*:

*"Yes."..(thinks that he will be better in another Centre)... "Because I will already have company there." ... " Well, it won't be all these... and these..."... "Well, the whole, but not the second year." ... "I will!.. Because I'm leaving. (laughs)..." ... "Well, yes, but I'm leaving for two months."...(home for the holidays)(M2)*

Although in their statements they express satisfaction with the completion of their education at the Centre, there is an *awareness of completion of education and double feelings about leaving the Centre*:

*"To say goodbye.. From a friend..."... "It makes me a little happy, and a little sad. It won't be our van anymore, it was very good when it squeezed on highway 180, it always squeezes so much... when I was sitting in the front, it made me happy."...I'm not really... on the last day of school." (M14)*

*"I didn't say anything..."... "Ivanka said to shut up, she is strict.".... "Can I stay here? She said, you can't, you're going back to Vinkovci. That's decided. I found you accommodation, that's what I heard the other week. I'm not really happy that I'm leaving there. And I'm a little sad now." (M14)*

Also, the *feeling of nostalgia for the Centre* can be felt in the statements of the participants who are leaving the Centre:

*„And I will miss the Centre a little. And this one...I will miss it" ... "I will miss the games, I will especially miss Mrs.\*... "... "I will not miss some things from the Centre that bother me.".. (M12)*

*"..I'm not really on the last day of school... I'm used to it now." (M13)*

MEMORIES OF EVENTS FROM THE CENTRE

Regarding the memory of the events from the Centre, the statements of the participants are different - *feelings about graduating a special institution:*

*"To be happy...Yes".. (wish he had finished his old/regular school)... "Nothing... I will go to school normally.... Yes. (quietly)"... "Yes!"..(would rather have gone to the old school and been at home). (M2)*

When they talk about what they will remember about the Centre - *positive memories of the Centre:*

*"Sports."...(will remain in his memory when he leaves the Centre)... "Mmm...Yes..." and competitions..." I did, I have 13 medals....Yes..."..."The stupid things I did there in that Centre...(quietly)" (M10)*

*"A fond memory?...A friend... B\*, G\*, S\* O\* and J\* S\*...Yes..."...(will remain in his memory)(M14)*

*"I will not miss some things from the Centre that bother me.".. (M12)*

NEW ACCOMMODATION

As it was already written, the end of education for some adolescents with disabilities means going to a new accommodation, which they talk about with *a feeling of uncertainty related to new accommodation:*

*"I don't know, I'll see."...(how it will be in the new Centre)... "If it gets bad, I'll tell my guardian to come back here."..."I don't think so, I know that other children have to come here." ...."Nothing if..." (he won't be able to return to the Centre)... "I don't know, I haven't met yet. "... "Yes..." (a bit afraid of going to the new Centre). (M7)*

*"It won't be the same dining room there, you just cook and eat there."... "And I don't know yet."..."I will see more after the graduation lunch." (M14)*

*„Somehow I...I don't like going there. Because I got used to it and I would stay here. I played with (one boy) the most, there in the park, we played on the do you know...what's it called? Carousel. “ ... "I'm just afraid of how it will be there." (M14)*

There is also a feeling of dissatisfaction with the decision on new accommodation:

*It doesn't make me happy, I'm used to it (to be here). My caretaker is pushing me further to the Centre, but I'm not happy about that.”... "I agree, but the social worker annoys me a little because she pushes me, and bothers me.”... "I would prefer to stay here.”... "I'm used to it now.”... "That's how life is, that's how they decided the accommodation.” (M11)*

*"We are moving because we found accommodation in Mala Terezia. " ... "I will be there now.”... "I visited everything there last week.” (M13)*

*"Can I stay here? She said, you can't, you're going back to Vinkovci. That's decided. I found you accommodation, that's what I heard the other week. I'm not really happy that I'm leaving there. And I'm a little sad now.” (M14)*

#### 6.1.3.5. The fifth theme is SOCIAL CONTEXT

The fifth theme contains three sub-themes and shows different possibilities of maintaining or creating relationships among peers in a transitional period, as support in the transition itself or as a new experience in a specific period of life.

Table 22: Theme *Social context* with sub-themes

<b>SOCIAL CONTEXT</b>	PEER RELATIONSHIPS DURING THE TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL
	OTHER SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES IN SECONDARY SCHOOL
	TERMINATION OF EDUCATION

#### PEER RELATIONSHIPS DURING THE TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

When looking at the peer relationship, the participants expressed different points of view - *satisfaction with the termination of relationships with peers from the current Centre:*

"I'm not!"..(sorry that he's going to leave some friends)... "In (secondary school)?.. H\*.... H\*... They are going to be body technician..."(M5)

Also, they expressed - a feeling of relief because of meeting peers in a new school and somewhat disinterested in whether he will know someone in the new class or new school: "Yes. ... New friends, my future classmate, practice."... "Great."...(feels because of it) (M12)

"I don't know that."...(will any of my friends go to the same school)... "No."... none of his friends from eighth grade will go to school with him) (M12)

"I have no idea."...(doesn't know anyone at the new school)... "Mmmmm...No!"..(none of friends are going to that school)... "I don't know."..(whether someone from the Centre also goes to that school)... "No!" ..(didn't talk to other students about going to the same school).(M9)

"No. "... (none of his friends are going for the same occupation )... "Yes."...(will be alone in the class)... "Yes."...( a little afraid of who he will sit down with on the first day of school) (M7)

In their statements, the participants express their interest and desire to *make new friends at the new school* or to already meet some students with whom they will hang out - *will have friends at the same school*: "Well, I have, now that we went to see the schools, where are we, then.. met one ... and what first grade.... will go now..." (M6)

"Yes."...(will have some new friends).... "Aaa....So-so. Hmmm.(shrugs his shoulders)." (in relation to new friends) (M4)

"Yes." ...(question: do you think you could find a real friend in the new school ?). (M7)

One participant perceives the situation that *there is no known student in the new school* as a positive thing:

..." And will.... This is not really a mature bunch that goes to class with me.....are they" ... "Yes, for the painter.. "... (will go to school for that occupation)... „Yes..." (even better if he goes alone to the next class)... "I don't know..."(M8)

Some participants are relieved by the idea that they will have some friends they know in their new school and to know some friends in the new accommodation - *friends from primary school also go to secondary school*:

*"I think V\*, G\*, then H\*... no, H\* goes to (another Centre)."... "So me, G\*, V\* and M\* are going to (secondary school)." (M7)*

*"Yes. And there are also in (another Centre), I know two." (M8)*

*„Well, I guess... I think."...(some friends will go to the same class).... "Well, I guess we will."...(go to the same class)... "No, me and M\*are just going..." (for the same occupation)... "Mmmm." ...(thinks he will go to the same class with a friend)... "Mmmmm. (nods his head)"..(that's a little easier for him)(M4)*

### OTHER SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

One participant expresses disinterest in maintaining close friendships, but also in creating new relationships with peers:

*"Well, I won't hang out much because there are all kinds of people there in (secondary school)." .... "Well, I won't really be alone, but there is...I will meet (one boy) and ok..."... "What if I don't like it?... Well, I'll keep quiet, what the hell." (M11)*

### TERMINATION OF EDUCATION

For participants who do not go to secondary school, the end of the school year means the end of education. *Attitude towards not continuing education and plans for life outside the Centre* can be deduced from their statements

*„When I finish this school, I will go to Vinkovci. I no longer go near Vrbovac, I go a little further. " ... "We are moving because we found accommodation in Mala Terezia. "(M13)*

*„I don't know... " ...(why he doesn't go to secondary school).... "I don't know..."...( who asked him about secondary school)... "So, they told me there... there. She said that 8b doesn't go..." (M14)*

*"...(no answer)...Have fun, socialize and so on" (when he finishes school)... ". Happy....Yes... Right."..(when leaves the Centre)... "Yes."...( happy that he has finished his education at the Centre) (M14)*

*"And I will miss the Centre a little. And this one...I will miss it"... "I will miss the games, I will especially miss Mrs. N\*"(M12)*

*"This is where I am used to, this is where my home is." (M14)*

*"..I'm not really on the last day of school... I'm used to it now." (M13)*

Regarding the end of the education of adolescents with disabilities, only one statement came out as *the parents' attitude towards the termination of education: "Got used..." ( not going to secondary school)...( Parents) "They say good" ...( that he will be at home after elementary school)...( Parents are) "rejoicing". (M13)*

## 6.2. Analysis of the focus group with the professionals

This section presents the process of qualitative analysis of data collected through the focus group with professionals. Everything that preceded the focus group implementation and the specifics of the focus group are described in Chapter 5.3.2. A focus group interview was conducted according to the protocol and contained eight questions.

### Questions asked in a focus group interview:

1. What do you see as your role in supporting young people in transition from the Centre for Education?
2. What is your opinion about the real reasons for relocating/coming students with disabilities to a special institution/ Centre for Education?
3. How do you think the experience of students with disabilities is different in a regular than in a special school- Centre for Education?
4. How well are students with disabilities prepared for the transition from primary to secondary school?
5. What do you see as challenges in this kind of preparation?
6. What is the positive support that you can offer to students with disabilities in transition?
7. How legislative changes in Croatia can change the experience of education for students with disabilities?
8. What would you like to see changed in the institutional policy and practice?



#### 6.2.1. Displaying the themes from the focus group with the professionals

The data analysis process was conducted through six phases as it was described earlier (Chapter 5.4). The following Table 23 presents the qualitative analysis of the focus group interview with professionals, based on the questions asked in a focus group interview. Given that previously the data from interviews with adolescents were obtained through thematic analysis, it was logical to apply the same methodology in the case of focus group interviews. In this way, recognizable themes and codes were obtained, which could be connected to each other, in order to obtain answers to research questions. It is important to note that the table includes all questions asked in the focus group interview, but only highlights the key responses that contributed to significant codes and themes.

Professionals' perceptions of the experience of adolescents with disabilities in the transitional period from primary to secondary school through research questions will be analysed and discussed in Chapter 7.

**Neobranjena verzija = Pre-defense version**

Table 23. Course of qualitative analysis of the focus group interview with professionals

Question	STATEMENTS OF PARTICIPANTS Professionals	CODES I	CODES II	CATEGORY
<i>What do you see as your role in supporting young people in transition from the Centre?</i>	“ Well, I could compare it, for example, as I have a private situation at home with my child who is now in the fifth grade, so it reminded me of when I used to have secondary school students, I was a teacher of secondary school students. So it was a completely new situation.“ (F4)	New life situation	Coping with new social situations	<b>PROVIDING SUPPORT DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD</b>
	“ They were more or less here... They knew all of us educators, and professors, so we were quite close considering that the children are also there in the home. this. So now we found ourselves with a bunch of new faces, professors, who, let's say... I mean, who didn't know them, neither did the children, nor did the children know them, and that's where the most important thing was... for me personally... that support that we make it easier for them to get to know each other better.“ (F4)	New teachers who do not know students with disabilities	Facilitating relationships and transition support	<b>PROVIDING SUPPORT DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD</b>

	<p>“ Let's say there were children who made an excellent first impression, and that means maybe it wasn't... that was not the situation, their abilities were not what they made the impression at first glance, or vice versa.</p> <p>Let's say especially children who had some communication difficulties, so they always left a worse impression than their abilities were. And it means making it easier for them to contact first with their classmates, then with others. There they suddenly encounter I don't know how many new professors, new subjects, and it wasn't easy at all.“ (F4)</p>	Communication problems make a bad first impression	Impression of the abilities of students with disabilities	<b>ABILITIES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>
<i>What do you see as your role in supporting young people in transition from the Centre?</i>	<p>“ And it means making it easier for them to contact first with their classmates, then with others. There, they suddenly encountered I don't know how many new professors, and new subjects, and it wasn't easy at all. “ (F4)</p>	Facilitate contact with new teachers and new subjects	Providing support in new school situations	<b>PROVIDING SUPPORT DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD</b>
	<p>“ That is... So the eighth grade is the time when children prepare for confirmation, which is a very good period at that moment when they need support. Where there are a lot of themes and a lot of biblical</p>	Connecting everyday life situation with religious values	Developing skills and values necessary for everyday life	<b>SKILLS AND VALUES NEEDED FOR EVERYDAY LIFE</b>

	<p>characters in which they rely... these characters rely on God and experience support from God. So, I understood my role in encouraging them to rely on God as much as possible, which means that through this and learning some content, I should connect it as much as possible with their life and their future situations and that we practice in some way this return to God, prayer and at least some small segment of behaviour in which they will be able to rely on God, the church and the help of the church, not only in secondary school but also later. And later on, we also had topics about occupation, about spending free time, that's all in the eighth grade program.“ (F3)</p>			
	<p>“ ...didn't have many generations of eighth graders, but the ones I had, I know that for almost the entire semester, the last semester of the eighth grade, we worked on some topics related to their future profession, with getting to know the possibilities of continuing education and the profession they will choose, and with the schools or centres where they may go.“ (F6)</p>	<p>Getting to know possible occupations through learning different topics</p>	<p>Possibilities of choosing a future profession</p>	<p><b>CONTINUATION OF SCHOOLING/EDUCATION</b></p>

<p><i>What do you see as your role in supporting young people in transition from the Centre?</i></p>	<p>“ I think that all of us who worked with eighth graders worked with them in the areas of their emotional and social empowerment, self-awareness and self-confidence because... I mean, they were protected in our facilities, lived and studied for so many years, and we knew to let them into something new, something unknown. “ (F8)</p>	<p>Awareness and familiarization with one's own emotions and self-confidence</p>	<p>Appropriate reaction in new situations</p>	<p><b>ENCOURAGING INDEPENDENCE</b></p>
	<p>“ And I think that... I can do it for myself personally, but I believe that we all just worked on trying to strengthen them towards that independence. To find their way in the outside world, because I think that with us, due to purely organizational and life conditions, they are still under some kind of bell.“ (F8)</p>	<p>Building independence and readiness for life outside the institution</p>	<p>Adequate reaction in new situations outside the institution</p>	<p><b>ENCOURAGING INDEPENDENCE</b></p>
	<p>“ Here were the majority of our users, as they are actually called now, under some glass bell, they were careful where they were going, that they should not be alone on the playground, and now actually... or anywhere else of course... and now she appeared completely a new situation, which is that they had a certain amount of freedom... and freedom actually means responsibility that you have to have. So, for</p>	<p>Encouraging and developing independence and self-confidence in new situations</p>	<p>Independence in new life situations</p>	<p><b>ENCOURAGING INDEPENDENCE</b></p>

<p><i>What do you see as your role in supporting young people in transition from the Centre?</i></p>	<p>example, they independently went to school, to practice, and returned from school, and for some it was a completely new experience.“ (M1)</p>			
	<p>“ So, in general, I think, not only about our education and taking care of them, but in fact, in general, all education is done upside down, so you learn the number of cows, how many there are in Croatia in percentages, and you don't learn life.“ (M1)</p>	<p>Neglected learning of everyday life skills</p>	<p>Learning unnecessary data and information</p>	<p><b>LIMITATION OF ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN A SPECIAL SCHOOL</b></p>
	<p>“ So they rode with us and with the teachers a hundred times, I don't know where they went, but now he actually goes alone. “ (M1)</p>	<p>A student with disabilities does not know where to go to get home</p>	<p>They do not possess the knowledge needed in everyday life situations</p>	<p><b>LIMITATION OF ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN A SPECIAL SCHOOL</b></p>
	<p>“ I don't mean to give our criticism here, here's an example... you all know it's me, if I don't name him, we'll say his name is Ivan, that I'm quite close to him, so nobody knows who it is. ...so that Ivan gets involved in life, he gets some kind of job, but already before, and he has no idea what it's like to go to the bank... even though we were... he doesn't know what an ATM is, he doesn't know what is a secret number</p>	<p>A student with disabilities in everyday life doesn't know how to go to the bank or what is secret number for his/ her bank account</p>	<p>Students with disabilities in the institution do not have the opportunity to acquire knowledge from practical everyday life</p>	<p><b>LIMITATION OF ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN A SPECIAL SCHOOL</b></p>

<p><i>What do you see as your role in supporting young people in transition from the Centre?</i></p>	<p>of bank account.... So now a new, living, real space is being created, where you should have... “ (M1)</p>			
	<p>“ I think that there is actually a big one... I have some kind of children at home as well and my wife supposedly also those children... so I see when they, even though they live in a normal family, how much they actually lack some concrete things. “ (M1)</p>	<p>Lack of opportunities to learn skills and knowledge for everyday in regular family</p>	<p>Students living with regular family do not have the opportunity to acquire knowledge from practical everyday life</p>	<p><b>LIMITATION OF ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS</b></p>
	<p>“ So I think that a new space is created for them, some new experiences, a journey through life. And I think we were there as much as we knew and could, each in our own segment, helped because he saw some holes, me in sports, you in mathematics, it doesn't matter, someone else in something else, and then the next time she came out that generation was a little bit smarter, so we knew how to perhaps correct some steps or supplement what we didn't at the beginning. That's what I think...“ (M1)</p>	<p>Opportunities to learn skills and knowledge for everyday life</p>	<p>Possibility to use skills and knowledge in everyday life</p>	<p><b>LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE INSTITUTION</b></p>
	<p>“ Yes, but it is important, it is very important that children can manage, leave, that they know where to go, that they know what they need in the police, what</p>	<p>Getting to know important public institutions</p>		



<i>What do you see as your role in supporting young people in transition from the Centre?</i>	they need in some kind of public institutions, but somehow it seems to me that maybe older children, maybe not for primary school children, I don't know. “ (F5)		Becoming independent	<b>LEARNING SKILLS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING</b>
	“ Which is the complete opposite I think of what you need to know. So you are smarter because you know more stupid, useless numbers, and something you need in real life is a little neglected. “ (M1)	Neglected learning of everyday life skills	Learning unnecessary data and information	<b>LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE INSTITUTION</b>
	“ You know, when somehow in your life it comes to you as normal to do the basics and then you go there with her. So maybe we didn't... I don't know, maybe we should have done such things with children through elementary school? “ (F5)	Opportunities to learn skills and knowledge for everyday life	Possibility to use skills and knowledge in everyday life	<b>LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE INSTITUTION</b>
	“ I was also thinking of moving through the city... In fact, any form... I personally think... the more experience you have in a certain period, of course... you don't go.... I now have a daughter who, for example, finished the eighth grade last year class. She must be 16 years old or earlier, she is involved in sports and some kind of activity, she must have an ID card. Let's say, then... Our children find it much more	Learning concrete knowledge and skills	Learning to navigate everyday activities	<b>EVERYDAY SKILLS</b>

	difficult, I wasn't thinking about it specifically, but I think that through that we learned some other things that we should have done in that period.“ (M1)			
<i>What do you see as your role in supporting young people in transition from the Centre?</i>	“ With first generation we didn't know, the second time already in the next generation we thought it was good, but what I would actually round off so we don't get it wrong, I think we need to teach them some things that are important for life. I'm saying, not the number of cows and this or, that he knows seven to eight minus 24 times 17, but that he knows something how to ask, how to get back if you get lost, call on a cell phone and something specific like that.“ (M1)	Learning concrete knowledge and skills	Learning to navigate everyday activities	<b>EVERYDAY SKILLS</b>
	“ Through the eighth grade, a lot of work is done in subject teaching Croatian language so that they know how to compose their own, let's say, truncated life or something like that. A lot of work is being done on that. It's working on a certain one... is that right? Through the eighth grade, we always worked on this in subject Croatian language...“ (F5)	Learning knowledge for independent living	Learning the necessary data and information for everyday situations	<b>PREPARING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FOR FURTHER EDUCATION</b>

	<p>“ That's right... And I mean... But you know what? I think it is very important for their further education, job one day and so on. We have always worked in this sense, especially with the eighth grade.” (F6)</p>	<p>Learning knowledge for further education</p>	<p>Learning the necessary data and information for everyday situations</p>	<p><b>PREPARING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FOR FURTHER EDUCATION</b></p>
	<p>“ Now to correct myself, I had two generations of eighth graders... In that generation I was at home with all the children, me and the whole group did the trip, which means going home and back. Those who were closer, normally I didn't go with (name of student). And also the next generation and with them I also did this movement and journey with everyone, so that they can move independently, so that way home and to school.” (F6)</p>	<p>Learning how to walk from school to home on your own</p>	<p>Strengthening independence in movement and navigating the local environment</p>	<p><b>LEARNING SKILLS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING</b></p>
	<p>“ I was also thinking of moving through and knowing the city... In fact, every form... I personally think... the more experience you have in a certain period, the easier it will be...” (M1)</p>	<p>Learning concrete knowledge and skills</p>	<p>Learning to navigate everyday activities</p>	<p><b>EVERYDAY SKILLS</b></p>

Question	STATEMENTS OF PARTICIPANTS Professionals	CODES I	CODES II	CATEGORY
<i>Why do students with disabilities come to the institution?</i>	<p>“ ...but I mean failure at school.....Failure at school is sometimes, apart from those who have objective difficulties, the result of the family's situation not being good. “ (F6)</p> <p>“ ...yes, that's not good either... “ (F5)</p> <p>“ ....Frustrating.. and..there is also the school failure...” (F2)</p> <p>“ ...that's a clinical picture of a behavioural problems...” (F8)</p> <p>“ ...they are violent...restless...” (F2)</p>	Integration problems	Expectations of students with disabilities in the regular class	<b>PROBLEM IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM</b>
	„So I guess ... and let's just say, by their ability, they could be integrated into mainstream schools ... so I guess they come when ... I mean, I guess, we know they come when some complex problems start.” (F4)	Attitude towards students with disabilities in the regular system	Expectations of students with disabilities in the regular class	<b>PROBLEM IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM</b>
	“ ... and you do some families a favour by taking their child...(F2)	Way of solving problems	Emotional connections of the family	<b>ABSENCE OF SYSTEMATIC SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>
	...more of them, let's say there are 25 of them in some kind of lower classes and they still somehow tolerate them...” (F5)	Larger number of students in the class	Number of students with disabilities in regular classes	<b>EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE REGULAR SYSTEM</b>

<i>Why do students with disabilities come to the institution?</i>	“ Unfortunately, what happens is that the parents save themselves because they get rid of the child, and that's actually bad because, first of all, the emotional bond between the child and the family is broken, and after a while, those families are really separated emotionally.“ (F5)	Severance of emotional bond between family members	Emotional connections of the family	<b>ABSENCE OF SYSTEMATIC SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>
	“ So the constant failure is frustrating. And you're crazy bigger after a while when you're minus, minus, minus everywhere... “ (M1)	A constant feeling of failure	Emotional reaction to failure in school	<b>FAILURE IN THE REGULAR EDUCATION SYSTEM</b>
	“ Very often that failure is the trigger, especially in these behavioral disorders.“ (F2)	A constant feeling of failure	Emotional reaction to failure in school	<b>FAILURE IN THE REGULAR EDUCATION SYSTEM</b>
	... "then let's say when the teacher is ok... in the lower classes they somehow tolerate them. Most of these who came to my generation, that is fifth, sixth and seventh grade, when they no longer know what to do with them in the regular system, and then they put them here with good intellectual abilities and label them..." (F2)	Teachers do not know how to work with students with disabilities	Teachers in regular schools do not have the competence to work with students with disabilities	<b>EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE REGULAR SYSTEM</b>
	“ ...three reasons: difficulties in the family, poor socioeconomic statuses the least, actually the least of them are due to failure at school" (F8)	Various problems in the family as a primary problem	Reasons for coming to a special institution	<b>SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION IN THE FAMILY</b>
<i>Why do students with disabilities come to the institution?</i>	“ ...there are still a lot of children who are integrated into the regular system, but their abilities are much lower.“ (F3)	Expectations of students with disabilities in the regular class	Attitude towards students with disabilities in the regular system	<b>PROBLEM IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM</b>

	<p>“ And of course family is very important, family support, which most of our children do not have. Meaning that if they have functional family, the vast majority of them could be integrated into mainstream schools..”(F4)</p>	<p>A better family situation gives a greater possibility of integration into the regular class</p>	<p>Family functionality as a factor</p>	<p><b>EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE REGULAR SYSTEM</b></p>
	<p>“If parents have better “social status” they will more take care of their child ... because this status carries some financially opportunities ... and then it is easiest to do it and vice versa... if family is poor ... to help a child not to sinks deeper then put him in an institution ...”(M1)</p>	<p>Child care depends on the status of the parents</p>	<p>Family functionality as a factor</p>	<p><b>EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE REGULAR SYSTEM</b></p>
	<p>“Plenty of children who are integrated in the regular system and have lower abilities have a better family situation so they are in the regular system...”(F1)</p>	<p>The importance of the social status of the family</p>	<p>Attitude towards students with disabilities in the regular system</p>	<p><b>EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE REGULAR SYSTEM</b></p>
	<p>“So I assume... and let's say, according to their abilities, they could be integrated into regular schools... so I assume that they come when... I mean, I suppose... I think they are known to come when some complex problems start. And of course there is the very important family, family support, which most of our children do not have. It means that if the family is functional, they, the vast majority of them, could be integrated into regular schools.” (F4)</p>	<p>Lack of family support</p>	<p>The importance of family support</p>	<p><b>SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION IN THE FAMILY</b></p>

<p><i>Why do students with disabilities come to the institution?</i></p>	<p>“Out there, it is 90 and I don't know what percentage of cases are solved the other way around, so they come to us for psychosocial treatment from their families. And then it is much easier for you to function that way, because they are actually intellectually stronger, they know exactly their rights, they insist on them. Of course, if the state, the country supports them, then the transition is easier.” (M1)</p>	<p>Providing adequate service</p>	<p>Systematically providing adequate support</p>	<p><b>SYSTEM OF SUPPORT FOR THE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES</b></p>
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Question	STATEMENTS OF PARTICIPANTS Professionals	CODES I	CODES II	CATEGORY
<i>How do you think the experience of students with disabilities is different in a regular than in a special school- Centre for Education?</i>	"In fact, it's all really upside down ... the child has difficulties in the family, then we get him out of that family instead of helping the family...."(F6)	You don't work with the family, and the child with disabilities is separated from the family	Separation of a child with disabilities in an institution instead of providing support to the family	<b>ABSENCE OF SYSTEMATIC SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>
	"... here we actually work with the child, and no one works with the family." (F5)	The family doesn't receive support	Support for a child with disabilities, but not for the family	<b>ABSENCE OF SYSTEMATIC SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>
	"that's all clear... one by one... that's how it is here" (M1)	The system has always been inert	The feeling of futility of the work they do	<b>THE FUTILITY OF WORK IN WHICH THERE IS NO CHANGE</b>
	"In fact, it turns out useless ... a futile job because the family basically remains bad...that family in which the child may eventually return ... everything stays the same ..."(F6)	The feeling of futile work because nothing changes within the family	The feeling of futility of the work they do	<b>MAINSTREAM EDUCATIONAL POLICIES NONETHELESS INFLUENCE THE CHILD'S CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL EXPERIENCES.</b>
	In fact, it turns out useless ... a futile job because the family basically remains bad...that family in which the child may eventually return ... everything stays the same ..." (F6)	No one works with family	Absence of work with family	<b>ABSENCE OF SYSTEMATIC SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>



<p><i>How do you think the experience of students with disabilities is different in a regular than in a special school-Centre for Education?</i></p>	<p>“Here were (the majority) of our users, now as they are called, actually under some glass bell, it was watched where they were going, that they should not be alone on the playground, and now they actually... or anywhere else of course...” (M1)</p>	<p>Under the constant supervision of a teacher or educator</p>	<p>Specific living conditions</p>	<p><b>LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE SPECIAL SCHOOL</b></p>
	<p>“I mean, here they were protected in facilities, lived and educated for so many years.”(F8)</p>	<p>Everyday life under defined conditions</p>	<p>Daily schedules</p>	<p><b>LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE SPECIAL SCHOOL</b></p>
	<p>“To find their way in the outside world, because I think that in our country, due to purely organizational and life conditions, they are still under some kind of bell.” (F8).</p>	<p>Under the constant supervision</p>	<p>Specific living conditions</p>	<p><b>LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE SPECIAL SCHOOL</b></p>
	<p>“Students in the regular system goes home after school and those that are in the institution are in the structure for 24 hours ...” (F6)</p>	<p>Strict structure of the day</p>	<p>Daily schedules</p>	<p><b>LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE SPECIAL SCHOOL</b></p>
	<p>“Well, yes, but I think it's individual. Maybe they have more freedom, but realistically, most of our... how will they spend their free time, for example, and I think that most of our children are how they will spend their free time, in front of the television... for example.” (F4)</p>	<p>Students at home have more free time and different possibilities of how to use it</p>	<p>The way they spend their free time</p>	<p><b>THE POSSIBILITY OF CHOOSING WHAT THEY WANT TO DO AT HOME</b></p>
	<p>“If they go with their parents on some trips, to some I don't know what kind of events, I think that's... not really (quietly)...” (F4)</p>	<p>Free time with the family on trips</p>	<p>Free time with the family</p>	<p><b>USING FREE TIME WITH FAMILY</b></p>
	<p>“As much as an institution improves, it can never replace a home ...”(F2)</p>	<p>An institution cannot replace a family</p>	<p>The role of the institution for children with disabilities</p>	<p><b>SEPARATION FROM FAMILY</b></p>
	<p>“I'm not saying that those who go home don't have structure, but they certainly have much more freedom to choose what they want to do, how they will spend their free time, who they will spend it with.”(F2)</p>	<p>Greater freedom and free time to use as they wish at home</p>	<p>Freedom to choose how you spend your free time at home</p>	<p><b>THE POSSIBILITY OF CHOOSING WHAT THEY WANT TO DO AT HOME</b></p>

<p><i>How do you think the experience of students with disabilities is different in a regular than in a special school-Centre for Education?</i></p>	<p>“And here they are always together ... the school is in the morning ... they are in the same group together ... they never have the space to be alone with themselves. “(F1)</p>	<p>Students with disabilities are always together in the institution</p>	<p>There is no opportunity for "my own time" in the institution</p>	<p><b>THERE IS NO TIME FOR ONESELF IN THE INSTITUTION</b></p>
	<p>“Of course, a child who has a great family and is happy at home feels better at home.....(everyone laughs)...“(F6)</p> <p>“...that he will feel better....“(M1)</p>	<p>A child with a good family feels better at home</p>	<p>The situation at home as a factor of satisfaction with the stay in the institution</p>	<p><b>HOW THE CHILD FEELS IN THE INSTITUTION DEPENDS ON THE SITUATION AT HOME</b></p>
	<p>“Of course, you do the least evil you can. “(M1)</p>	<p>Separation from the family as the best option</p>	<p>It is done in the best interest of the child</p>	<p><b>A BAD FAMILY SITUATION</b></p>
	<p>“How many students are missing their parents?...just to consider that fact, to see family, is a great thing ... a whole week “ (F7)</p>	<p>Students are separated from their families for the entire week</p>	<p>Students miss their parents and family</p>	<p><b>FEELING OF SEPARATION FROM FAMILY</b></p>
	<p>“The difference is, first of all, in the regular system, they go home after school, and those who are in the institution are there 24 hours a day, I think... (M1)</p>	<p>Staying together all the time has a bad effect on some students</p>	<p>There is no opportunity for "my own time" in the institution</p>	<p><b>THERE IS NO TIME FOR ONESELF IN THE INSTITUTION</b></p>
	<p>“I think we should look at that... Let's say, if we imagine one of our children who is specifically here now, how he is here, and how he would be at home, and compare that child.“ (F6)</p>	<p>How an individual child fares in the institution depends on the situation at home</p>	<p>The situation at home as a factor of satisfaction with the stay in the institution</p>	<p><b>A BAD FAMILY SITUATION</b></p>
	<p>“...for example one girl, in what condition she came and how she is now... a completely different person. “(F3)</p> <p>“Unfortunately, he is better here. “(F5)</p>	<p>Some children with disabilities are better off in an institution</p>	<p>The situation at home as a reason for staying in an institution</p>	<p><b>BAD SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION IN THE FAMILY</b></p>
	<p>“...if he wasn't here... ..the best in the world....I think...“(F4)</p>	<p>Children with disabilities do not feel well in the institution</p>	<p>Children with disabilities separated from their families</p>	<p><b>FEELING OF SEPARATION FROM FAMILY</b></p>

	<p>“That's how I thought about it, that it was a lot of rules. The rules, the rules, crushed my soul. Put us now for 2 months, here we are, me in a separate room, not with you, so I can ask you in 2 months. And that's the army, it really has to be in order, that's clear.</p> <p>Well, that's for you... to .... to really freak out...”(M1)</p>	Strict structure of the day	Daily schedules	<p><b>LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE SPECIAL SCHOOL</b></p>
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Question	STATEMENTS OF PARTICIPANTS Professionals	CODES I	CODES II	CATEGORY
<i>How well are they prepared for the transition from primary to secondary school?</i>	“I think that all of us who worked with the eighth graders also worked with them in the areas of their emotional and social empowerment, and self-awareness and self-confidence because they are.” (F8)	With students with disabilities, work was done in the field of emotional and social skills	Emotional and social empowerment	<b>EMPOWERMENT</b>
	“We knew we were letting them into something new, something unknown. And I think that... I can do for myself personally, but I believe that we all just worked on trying to strengthen them towards that independence.” (F8)	Getting into new and unknown situations	Emotional and social empowerment	<b>EMPOWERMENT</b>
	“I think that we are all together in all our competences as best as we could, however it is one thing when you talk to them, and another thing when they have their own personal experience. They still learn the most through their experience, and I think it would be strange if they didn't feel fear, uncertainty.” (F2)	Learning through discussion and practical experience	Learning for future life experience	<b>WELL-PREPARED FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL</b>
	“No matter how you prepare them, you can never fully prepare them for everything that awaits them. But that one adaptation period in that transition	Regardless of the preparation, there is a need for help in the adaptation period	Specifics of the adaptation period	<b>SUPPORT NEEDED</b>

	period, I think it's wrong that we have to jump in and help them.“ (F2)			
<i>How well are they prepared for the transition from primary to secondary school?</i>	“I mean in general, not only our education and care for them, but in fact all education in general is done upside down, so you learn the numbers of cows, how many people there are in Croatia in percentages, and you don't learn things for life. Which is the complete opposite I think of what you need to know. So you are smarter because you know more stupid, useless numbers, and something you need in real life is a little neglected. "(M1)	Unnecessary information is learned, and little neglected information for real life	Not learning concrete knowledge and skills	<b>LACK OF SKILLS FOR REAL LIFE</b>
	“It's just normal. No matter how much you get to know and prepare the child, the child will feel and will always have a certain amount of uncertainty and fear of something new. Well, we all have a fear of something new and we feel uncertainty in that sense.”(F5)	The feeling of insecurity and fear is present in students with disabilities	Fear of new situations	<b>FEELINGS DUE TO NEW SITUATIONS</b>
	“I think that you have prepared them very well for secondary school, I think so. I know since I came here from the beginning that... I went with some colleagues with eighth graders to get to know and	Adolescents went to see other Centres where they will continue their education	Future secondary schools are known to students with disabilities	<b>WELL-PREPARED FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL</b>

	see the Centres, that is, the schools where they will possibly go. I think it was OK.“ (M1)			
<i>How well are they prepared for the transition from primary to secondary school?</i>	“I think that all of us, not only me as an educator, but all of us, professors, teachers, educators here and who all made 24 hours a day absolutely everything so that... they start secondary school as safely as possible...” (F8)	Support provided in every sense	Students prepared for secondary school	<b>SAFE START TO SECONDARY SCHOOL</b>
	“Of course, there is always something that can be improved, but plus or minus, they also heard from those who left before what the situation was, so I think they knew. What I always thought was a bit strange and funny that some wanted to be pilots, hairdressers and something like that, because it was a realistic limitation. This is how it seems to me that we actually did a good job in general. But of course, it can always be done better...”(M1)	Wishes of adolescents with disabilities limited due to realistic barriers	Preparation for secondary school can be varied	<b>WELL-PREPARED FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL</b>

Question	STATEMENTS OF PARTICIPANTS Professionals	CODES I	CODES II	CATEGORY
<i>What do you see as challenges in this kind of preparation?</i>	“...now a completely new situation appeared, which is that they had a certain amount of freedom... and freedom actually means responsibility that you have to have.”(M1)  So, for example, they independently went to school, to practice, and returned from school, and for some it was a completely new experience (M1)	A feeling of freedom in a completely new life situation	New life situation	<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>
	"New acquaintances, new friendships" (F5).	Making new acquaintances and friendships	New friends in a new school	<b>RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS</b>
	"Freedom. That's what... They immediately feel very good..." (F7)	They feel good because they are free	A sense of maturity and responsibility	<b>RESPONSIBILITY</b>
	... and very adult. (F3) "...and very mature, yes. And responsibility." (F6)	They feel responsible	A sense of maturity and responsibility	<b>RESPONSIBILITY</b>
	"..well, it's being worked on, I think, later, but everyone is waiting for that transition for ... that certain feeling of freedom that they think they can have... "(F8)	A feeling of freedom in a new life situation	New life situation	<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>
	"...you can start smoking when you start secondary school...in the street...so what's wrong...(laughs)" (M1)  "...you don't have to tell the teacher that you came..." (F4)	Rules can be broken	New life situation	<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>
	"...those first generations of ours...yes, they were paratroopers..."(F8)	They hadn't knowledge of what to expect and what to do with adolescents with disabilities	They did not know how to prepare adolescents with disabilities for secondary school	<b>UNKNOWN WHAT A STUDENT WITH DISABILITIES CAN EXPECT IN SECONDARY SCHOOL</b>

	<p>”Unfortunately, it is difficult to find a job even if you finish regular schools and faculties... and we all know examples with our former student who is happy to work in a home for the elderly. I can only imagine how happy grandmothers are when they have such a good interlocutor.....” ( F4)</p>	Difficulty finding a job	Realistic life situations	<b>POSSIBILITIES OF CHOICE</b>
	<p>“So if that series of dots had not been connected, maybe by accident, maybe this way, maybe that way, there would have been a great danger that these children would have been lost somewhere.” (M1)</p>	The possibility of getting lost in the system	Realistic life situations	<b>POSSIBILITIES OF CHOICE</b>
<p><i>What do you see as challenges in this kind of preparation?</i></p>	<p>“Well, it also depends on the abilities of the children. My eighth graders are quite capable as it is, they have been going home alone for some time and so on. It depends on how much freedom you can give them. I also let them go to the city with some task so that they can do it, but... The problem is actually the kids who can't move independently, that's it. And they go to secondary school.” (F7)</p>	<p>The importance of the student's abilities and ability to move independently in the environment, outside the Centre</p>	<p>The student's abilities and created trust</p>	<b>CREATING A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST</b>



Question	STATEMENTS OF PARTICIPANTS Professionals	CODES I	CODES II	CATEGORY
<i>What is the positive support that you are able to offer to students with disabilities?</i>	“I mean, as far as the religious field is concerned, I have always tried not to leave anything in the air, but to make everything concrete in life, I think that is the meaning of all those activities that are outside of class. When I came to work here, I saw that theories are much more connected to life than in regular schools, due to the very nature of the work and the nature of the children. I think that... Well, of course it still needs to be done, I think that some kind of programs need to be made to make this transition easier for them, but I think we have done that enough...”(F3)	The connection between the nature of the work and students with disabilities	Creating support programs for students with disabilities	<b>TRANSITION PLANNING</b>
	“That support to make it easier for them...to make contact with each other, that they get to know each other better” (F4)	Getting to know and entering new people in life	To create a relationship	<b>CREATING A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST</b>
	“And it kind of makes it easier for them to get in touch first with the new teachers, then with the others. That's where they suddenly meet with.. I don't know ...how many new professors, new subjects, and it just wasn't easy.”(F4)	Getting to know and entering new people in life	Expanding the circle of people they know and peers	<b>CREATING A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST</b>
	“...since we have secondary school students in the Centre, there is already that communication... and they know more about what can be expected of them.” (F3)  "Yes, they are better prepared..."(F4)	Getting information about the new school through conversations with older students	Communication with older students	<b>BETTER PREPAREDNESS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL</b>
	“It seems to me exactly the same, since we have secondary school students that they are actually much more knowledgeable because they see... which way it goes.	Getting information about the new school through	Communication with older students	<b>BETTER PREPAREDNESS OF STUDENTS WITH</b>

<p><i>What is the positive support that you are able to offer to students with disabilities?</i></p>	<p>..and I think the same way..."(F6)</p> <p>"And again, they have familiar faces in (other Centre for Education), so they are not completely lost."(F4)</p>	<p>conversations with older students</p>		<p><b>DISABILITIES FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL</b></p>
	<p>" These two eighth graders of mine are looking forward to secondary school. It's like they can't wait, they have their own plans, and that's kind of what it is... They imagine it like that and I guess it's good for them... They imagine it well, so I guess it will be fine."(F7)</p>	<p>Planning the situation of leaving for secondary school</p>	<p>Positive excitement about going to secondary school</p>	<p><b>THE JOY OF GOING TO SECONDARY SCHOOL</b></p>
	<p>"Through the eighth grade, a lot of work is done in the Croatian language so that they know how to compose their own, let's say, truncated resume or something like that. A lot of work is being done on that. "(F5)</p>	<p>Learned how to write a resume</p>	<p>Learning important skills through subjects</p>	<p><b>CREATING READINESS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL</b></p>
	<p>"Through the eighth grade, we always worked on that in the Croatian language ...complete literacy." (F6)</p>	<p>Learned literacy</p>		
	<p>"In fact, we prepared them to move around the city independently, but when I try to remember, I think that I actually only let them go to the store in the eighth grade, that we didn't take any further walks, nor did we go in groups. Now how smart was that, should they be allowed to go into the city on their own in the eighth...? Or that you have to wait until secondary school for that? For the most part, as a group, we visited sights, went to stations, bus, train..."(F2)</p>	<p>Introduced to the local environment, moving around the city</p>	<p>Prepared for independent movement in the local environment, outside the Centre</p>	<p><b>PROVIDE SUPPORT AND HAVE CONFIDENCE IN ADOLESCENTS</b></p>

	"I'm saying in general that it seems to me that all in all, whatever criticisms we had, it actually went forward. Of course, it depends on what the children are like. Unfortunately, some still don't know how to move around the city today." (F4)	Progress is visible depending on the abilities of students with disabilities	Learning important skills through subjects	<b>TRANSITION PLANNING</b>
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Question	STATEMENTS OF PARTICIPANTS Professionals	CODES I	CODES II	CATEGORY
<i>How legislative changes in Croatia can change the experience of education for students with disabilities?</i>	<p>"So when you look at them... let's say I'm talking now, when I'm thinking, I've been here long enough... Let's say we mention one of ours... I'm in contact with him quite often, make sure he passed his driver's license." (M1 )</p> <p>"Also, one of ours is the same ... a former user, he also passed his driver's license, he drives for example... you will laugh now... he drives a bus." (M1)</p>	Students with disabilities can pass the driving test	Enabling learning of new skills and knowledge	<b>OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>
	<p>"...we all know the example with our former student who really found an ideal job for himself, a caregiver in a nursing home. I can only imagine how happy grandmothers are when they have such a good interlocutor..."(F4) "He can talk to them for hours .. "(F8)</p> <p>"And then he found it himself, he was constantly surfing the Internet... And it was a private home... "(F3)</p>	A student with disabilities independently found a job for himself	Found a job online	<b>GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHOOSE FOR THEMSELVES</b>
	<p>"In fact, it's all really upside down ... the child has difficulties in the family, then we get him out of that family instead of helping the family...." (F6)</p>	The problems of families with children with disabilities are solved by separating the children from the family	The family should receive support in the system	<b>ENSURE ADEQUATE FAMILY SUPPORT IN THE SYSTEM</b>

<i>How legislative changes in Croatia can change the experience of education for students with disabilities?</i>	"It was about analysing that entire period of life and seeing where, in accordance with the laws, the situation can be improved precisely in the sense that children have greater freedom of choice, that they have... that their personality is nurtured, their desires to they respect. It was done in groups for a while, it was like some kind of program, that's what we were working on" (F3)	Allow students greater freedom of choice and respect for personality	To provide programs with more choices for students with disabilities	<b>TO ENABLE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TO HAVE MORE CHOICES</b>
	"No matter how much the institution is improved, I think that it should be changed internally...somewhat..." (F2)	Changing the institution should be done internally	A change in institutions is needed	<b>A CHANGE IN THE INTERNAL SYSTEM OF THE INSTITUTIONS IS NECESSARY</b>
	"I think it is very important for their further education, job one day and so on. We have always worked in this sense, especially with the eighth grade." (F6)	It is necessary to empower students with disabilities for future education	Empower students with disabilities	<b>IMPROVING SKILLS FOR FUTURE WORK</b>
	It is well thought out, but the conditions have not been created. For example, in my regular school in the neighbourhood, there are one to two children with disabilities in each class. We have one teaching assistant for every two children. So I think the conditions... do not exist." (F4)	Practical conditions for changes are not provided	System is not prepared for changes	<b>CONNECT LEGAL REGULATIONS AND PRACTICE</b>
	"Good, but new forms of support are developing, I think it has taken root..." (F6)  "...Yes... It will live...(sigh)... and it will be different." (M1)	A new form of support	Possibility to change	<b>TO IMPROVE THE FORM OF SUPPORT</b>
	"If the conditions at the school were different, if the teachers were prepared, if assistants were provided, if there was support from the family, it would certainly be different." (F6)	Provide support for students with disabilities in the regular system	Support for students with disabilities	<b>TO IMPROVE THE CONDITIONS IN PRACTICE</b>

	<p>"Yes, and I think that even the children who are integrated are made difficult by the criteria, I don't know, you know from the psychosocial department that every now and then you write your opinions for the assistant's approval. It means that for children who need an assistant in order to be well integrated and function in the regular system, the criteria for getting an assistant are getting harder, so fewer and fewer children can get an assistant."(F5)</p>	<p>Difficult conditions for obtaining a teaching assistant</p>	<p>Ensure the conditions for practical work in regular schools</p>	<p><b>TO IMPROVE THE CONDITIONS IN PRACTICE</b></p>
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Question	STATEMENTS OF PARTICIPANTS Professionals	CODES I	CODES II	CATEGORY
<i>What would you like to see changed in the institutional policy and practice?</i>	"And here they are always together ... the school is in the morning ... they are in the same group together ... they never have the space to be alone with themselves."(F1)	Students with disabilities are always together in the institution	There is no time for oneself in the institution	<b>CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PRIVACY OF ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>
	"And then we work with a child and nobody is working with the family... then we return child to that family ... we are then again at the beginning ..." (F8)	Return of the child to the family puts the support process back at the beginning	Uncovered areas in working with the family	<b>GIVE THE VALUE OF THE WORK DONE BY PROFESSIONALS</b>
	"...you protect him here, temporarily....You protect him here...and then he goes back..." (F2)	Care for a student with disabilities continues while they are in the institution	Support is only temporary	<b>TO IMPROVE THE FORM OF SUPPORT</b>
	"Let's say, if we imagine one of our children who is specifically here now, how he is here, and how he would be at home and compare that child. Of course, a child who has a great family and who is happy at home, that he is better at home. ...(everyone laughs)...".(F6)	Staying at the Centre versus staying at home	Comparison of living conditions	<b>LIVING CONDITIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>
	"...so we have to strengthen the family..."(F3)	The need to strengthen the family	Strengthen the family by providing support	<b>FAMILY SUPPORT</b>
	"I want to say that these conditions could be improved. It is certain that you are uniformed, that they hold you back, that they reduce your creativity and everything, general satisfaction and independence. "(F3)	Increase the possibility of creativity and general job satisfaction	Improve the possibilities of various education programs	<b>INCREASING SATISFACTION WITH THE WORK THEY DO</b>
	"How many students are missing their parents?...just to consider that fact, to see family, is a great thing ... a whole week "(F7)	Students miss their parents and family	Students stay at the Centre for the whole week	<b>STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ARE SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES</b>

	"I would like to ask all of us together whether someone has ever asked these children, these users, how they would like it to be? The rules, the rules, crushed my soul. Put us now for 2 months, here we are, me in a separate room, not with you, so I can ask you in 2 months. And that's the army, it really has to be in order, that's clear. You know, that's actually all the truth that they said." (M1)	To ask students with disabilities about their wishes	To hear the wishes of students with disabilities	<b>TO ENABLE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TO HAVE A CHOICE</b>
	"You don't have a problem with him, I don't, neither do the parents of any bigger ones. You need the support of the family, maybe in setting boundaries of some kind..."(F2)	Setting boundaries within the family	Strengthen the family by providing support	<b>FAMILY SUPPORT</b>
	"... I think that in higher grades, we should do more household work with them and give them the opportunity to learn some simple dishes... to cook, mmmm... to learn... I mean the general thing... about hygiene in the kitchen...I think it's very useful..."(F3)	Learning housework	Learning skills for everyday life	<b>LEARNING NEW SKILLS</b>
<i>What would you like to see changed in the institutional policy and practice?</i>	"And I think that it should... there is one gap in our system, and that is working with children when they graduate from secondary school. It's a very big gap, and from those who don't have an adequate family, a lot of children fail there." (F3)  "There is nothing there" (F8) "There's nothing, no." (F3)	There is a lack of follow-up of students with disabilities after secondary school	Absence of a system for monitoring students	<b>TRANSITION PLANNING</b>
	"So when some level, degree of something, education and so on ends, then in fact sometimes that gap happens. Let's say that gap is the biggest after secondary school. I knew it from before, and I know it now because I am directly connected in a story to what will happen after secondary school."(M1)	Lack of follow-up of students with disabilities after secondary school	Problem with data after secondary school	<b>TRANSITION PLANNING</b>
	"Thus under must ...in not organising...not prepared...(F8)			



<p><i>What would you like to see changed in the institutional policy and practice?</i></p>	<p>...again the frustration of the child who is in that system...(F1)</p> <p>"...and we're coming back again..."(F4)</p> <p>"... in that system, which is again misunderstood, it is..."(F1)</p> <p>"That's right, and we come back to the family again. To the family and the support of the family that is also not there." (F4)</p> <p>"Or back to the institution." (F4)</p>	<p>Lack of preparation of the educational system for working with students with disabilities</p> <p>Lack of preparation of the educational system for working with students with disabilities</p>	<p>Dissatisfaction of students in the regular system</p> <p>Dissatisfaction of students in the regular system</p>	<p><b>FAILURE OF EDUCATION IN THE REGULAR SYSTEM</b></p>
	<p>"But there is a problem. I have, for example, two children in my class now who came from a regular school. They have, say, a family, they have support in the family, the family is... okay. Neither of the other children managed in a regular school. There they were both reborn.." (F5)</p>	<p>Students with disabilities did better in a special school</p>	<p>Students with disabilities transferred to a special school</p>	<p><b>FAILURE OF EDUCATION IN THE REGULAR SYSTEM</b></p>
	<p>"Yes..... It's a shame that under those conditions... I guess we're talking about my university... at my university, I wrote (laughs) about the conditions that should be ensured for integration. So that's 20 or so years." (F5)</p>	<p>Necessary conditions for integration are not provided</p>	<p>Difficulties of integration / inclusion</p>	<p><b>PROVIDE BETTER CONDITIONS FOR THE INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b></p>
	<p>"...and again ..those assistants...according to that..these are the people...who also..I don't know...how many..."(F1)</p> <p>"... based on the experience of what the parents told me... so I don't know the real situation, so here, I'm only saying that part... they say that they are unprepared, that until yesterday they literally weren't.... they don't know what children with</p>	<p>Questionable field of work and usefulness of teaching assistants</p>	<p>Way of work of teaching assistants and knowledge of characteristics of students with disabilities</p>	<p><b>BETTER SUPPORT AND EDUCATION FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS IN REGULAR SCHOOLS</b></p>

<p><i>What would you like to see changed in the institutional policy and practice?</i></p>	<p>disabilities, how to approach them. Then when they mention some problems, there is a fear of that child, if the child is with more difficulties. So no... that personal assistant can't provide any good assistance... how to deal with it. .different profiles..... And they keep changing them.."(F1)</p> <p>"... they have no connection at all and no knowledge about children with disabilities. "(F2)</p> <p>"...and probably there is no special education teacher at the school...or maybe..."(F7)</p>	<p>Questionable field of work and usefulness of teaching assistants</p>	<p>Way of work of teaching assistants and knowledge of characteristics of students with disabilities</p>	<p><b>BETTER SUPPORT AND EDUCATION FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS IN REGULAR SCHOOLS</b></p>
	<p>"...so now we are ... some were present ... for a child from psychosocial support from a regular school where the whole professional service came, your room was full of them and they want to remove the child from the regular system.""... And the child's behaviour, which is common and every day for us here, they decided to remove..."(F8)</p>	<p>Regular schools do not know how to work with students with disabilities</p>	<p>Problems of how to approach and work with a student with disabilities</p>	<p><b>SUPPORT REGULAR SCHOOLS ON HOW TO WORK WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b></p>
	<p>Well, the number of children in the groups, for example...</p> <p>... Because now we have groups with different difficulties, different ages, different development. Somehow before I only had eighth grade, and now everything... From first to eighth. "(F7)</p> <p>"Well, yes, and it is more difficult to work with such a heterogeneous group of children than with... someone who is a little more similar in age, or in terms of material, or in terms of abilities."(F7)</p>	<p>Problematic composition and number of students in the group</p>	<p>Difficulty working with a mixed group of students with disabilities</p>	<p><b>FAILURE OF EDUCATION IN THE REGULAR SYSTEM</b></p>

<p><i>What would you like to see changed in the institutional policy and practice?</i></p>	<p>"More opportunities for individual work with our children. I think that our children are right now...deprived...that's what they really need most...to be alone with someone, and actually...that... they don't get as much as they need" (F6).</p>	<p>More opportunities for individual work with adolescents with disabilities</p>	<p>To ensure more time for individual work with students with disabilities</p>	<p><b>INDIVIDUAL WORK WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b></p>
	<p>"I think if we would have more space, we could have more ideas. So before we had... how should I say... we weren't so cramped with children, so you could do a lot more..."(F3)</p>	<p>More creative space is needed to work with students with disabilities</p>	<p>Enable specific individual-focused work with students with disabilities</p>	<p><b>INDIVIDUAL WORK WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b></p>
	<p>"So if I used to have 5 hours of something that I could create myself, then I could work on integration and meeting children from a regular school, I think that such meetings were useful, and today there is no space for that... I do it in my free time time."(F3)</p>	<p>Ensures more activities and socializing with students with disabilities from other regular schools</p>	<p>Enable specific individual-focused work with students with disabilities</p>	<p><b>INDIVIDUAL WORK WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b></p>
	<p>"The problem is, let's say concretely, I think the biggest one... is the limited range of occupations that they can choose from. "(F4)</p> <p>"...Especially girls." (F5)</p> <p>"...Yes, that's just the way it is....with our best will and preparation..."(F4)</p> <p>"...really...they have no chance..."(F5)</p> <p>Let's say a lot of wonderful professions have died out. I remember when I went to (one school) with one generation... they had tailoring facilities for assistant seamstresses. That was then, before... so</p>	<p>Limited range of occupations for students with disabilities</p>	<p>Limited options for choosing a future profession for students with disabilities</p>	<p><b>PROVIDE A GREATER CHOICE OF POSSIBLE OCCUPATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b></p>

<p><i>What would you like to see changed in the institutional policy and practice?</i></p>	<p>10, 15 years... is it still something from that and such occupations, but now, unfortunately... I mean, let's say it's something that would be useful for more capable girls..."(F4)</p>			
	<p>"I think that the choice of profession is not at all in line with the market and...with economic needs..."(F8)</p>	<p>Occupations for students with disabilities are not in line with the labour market</p>	<p>Limited options for choosing a future profession for students with disabilities</p>	<p><b>PROVIDE A GREATER CHOICE OF POSSIBLE OCCUPATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b></p>
	<p>"And those who, when you ask them, always want to be hairdressers. I don't know if you ask..."(F6)</p> <p>"...I don't know why they don't start..."(F8)</p> <p>"...Yes, something..."(M1)"</p>	<p>Increase the choice of educational programs for the occupations of students with disabilities</p>	<p>Limited options for choosing a future profession for students with disabilities</p>	<p><b>PROVIDE A GREATER CHOICE OF POSSIBLE OCCUPATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b></p>
	<p>"I don't know..an assistant beautician...I don't know..or a hairdresser...what is there...however, there is some possibility...to get a job somewhere..." (F8)</p>	<p>Increasing the possibility of finding a job for students with disabilities</p>	<p>To find a job</p>	<p><b>PROVIDE A GREATER CHOICE OF POSSIBLE OCCUPATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b></p>
	<p>"I watched one of our students today on TV, on television and I'm actually sorry that we didn't refer more children to... assistant web designer or I don't know what it's called, actually... it's some profession that ... and now we have more and more of these children who would actually do something like that.."(F6)</p> <p>"Yes, you know, I mean, what is his perspective as a bookbinder. Colleague just opened up another world for me, I hadn't thought about it at all. "(M1)</p> <p>"...let's say. chefs..."(F4)</p>	<p>Change of perspective on possible future occupations for students with disabilities</p>	<p>Change of possibilities of future occupations for students with disabilities</p>	<p><b>POSSIBLE FUTURE OCCUPATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b></p>

	".....Let's imagine a girl....painter...we're talking about auxiliary occupations....car mechanic, auto repair technician, I don't know, what a variety..."(M1)	Change of perspective on possible future occupations for students with disabilities	Change of possibilities of future occupations for students with disabilities	<b>POSSIBLE FUTURE OCCUPATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>
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## **7. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS**

This chapter will provide an interpretation of the findings and perspectives of the life of adolescents with disabilities, which will be viewed through the Bioecological Model of Human Development and Kohler's Taxonomy, which are set as a theoretical framework for observing the transition period.

The main goal of the focus group was to determine the perspective of experts and how they reflect on the life experience of adolescents with disabilities, as a mirror image of prominent themes and codes gathered from the interviews with adolescents with disabilities.

The presented data will provide a critical view of the Croatian education system for students with disabilities and how it affects professionals in their work, in creating opportunities to support young people in a specific period of life: the transition from primary to secondary school.

Each research question will be presented first through the interpretation of perceptions of adolescents with disabilities and then through the interpretation of perceptions of professionals who work with adolescents with disabilities.

Questions and the resulting perspective will be explained individually in the following subchapters.

### **7.1. Discussion through the interpretation of the perspective of experience of adolescents with disabilities and perspectives of professionals who work with the adolescents, about the first research question**

The following text provides an interpretation of the perspectives of experience of adolescents with disabilities and professionals about the first research question, which reads:

**What does the experience of living in an institution signify to students with disabilities?**

For the presentation of answers to the first research question, first will be analysed the perspective of adolescents with disabilities and the meaning they gave to their experience of living in an institution of social welfare.

#### 7.1.1. The perspective of adolescents with disabilities about the first research question

Following *the perspective of adolescents with disabilities* and their experience of living in an institution, the results indicate that adolescents with disabilities often link some situation or behaviour as the reasons why they have been transferred to an institution. Because of their experience, the participants developed mainly negative memories toward regular school. It is associated with negative memories of teachers, who, according to the participants' statements, didn't want to work or didn't have the competence to work with adolescents with disabilities.

School failures in the regular system is often added to this, negatively contributing to self-image and the feeling of failure. Such an image of themselves in statements is most often expressed with sadness or anger due to the situation, coming to the Centre.

The education process in the Centre for adolescents with disabilities is characterised by the differences in class size- small class or larger class, which most participants commented as positive. The role of teachers in the Centre is recognised as more positive, adolescents report a good experience with teachers, who work with them when they need help. Additionally, some adolescents with disabilities stated that they grasp material more easily with a special program and achieve better grades in all subjects, including mathematics. In line with (Vranjican et al., 2019. and Krampač- Grljušić, 2015) the Centre for Education is viewed as a stimulating environment with peers, in which adolescents feel accepted and gives them a sense of belonging, and plays an extremely important role in academic success, emotional development and a positive self-image. Contrary, four adolescents reported that they have a lack of motivation to study because they think that the material they are learning is too easy and they do the same thing every day. Decreased motivation for learning is possibly a consequence of a lack of self-esteem due to the changes taking place and increased concern for social acceptance, as the authors Akos (2006) and Frey et al. (2009) claim. The lack of motivation to learn can also be the result of a mismatch between the real abilities of students with disabilities - who could succeed in a regular supplementary program - and their placement in social welfare institutions, where they follow a special curriculum due to family circumstances and inclusion conditions in Croatia.

The advantage of the previous regular school, as seen by adolescents with disabilities, is that it was usually located near the participant's home, in contrast to the Centre., to which they have to travel longer (as previously described in Chapter 5.), adolescents with disabilities are more often from rural parts of country). Adolescents highlight separation from the family and community in which they lived. Important emotional responses to life in the Centre are emphasized by the desire and inability to go home for the weekend or even every day, as most adolescents with disabilities would like.

The impossibility of going home from the Centre is the most prominent issue of life in the institution according to the statements of adolescents with disabilities, which is in line with ecological models of development according to which the family plays a significant role in personal development (Rosa and Tudge, 2013).

It should be emphasized that the experience in the Centre that the adolescents report on is connected to their previous life experience, which determines their emotional reactions to the situation of arrival and stay in the institution. Depending on whether previous experiences at school or with peers were positive or negative, adolescents reject or embrace new daily situations and peer relationships. Based on experience, they decide whether they want to hang out with someone or accept certain situations if they make sense for them (for example, showering together in the bathroom).

In most situations, when adolescents with disabilities come to the Centre from a family environment, they notice some new situations and specific rules that are unfamiliar and uncomfortable (e.g. showering together or not being able to wear their clothes in the Centre).

Adolescents with disabilities characterize the daily routine in the Centre as very rigid and specific, which often doesn't take into account their habits and needs. Therefore, some adolescents find it difficult to accept and respect. Primarily, this refers to the strict schedule in daily routine and activities that are expected of them (e.g. the schedule of waking up and sleeping, cleaning, doing homework etc.).

For adolescents with disabilities, the social climate is important in accepting the change - arrival and the need to stay in the Centre. The theme *Social context* shows different possibilities of maintaining or creating relationships among peers in a transitional period, as support in the transition itself or as a new experience in a specific period of life. The benefits of friendship are emotional security, a positive self-image, satisfaction, social competence, satisfaction of intimacy needs, and adoption of prosocial norms of behaviour (Rys and Bear, 1997; Klarin, 2000).



Adolescents report positive and negative experiences with peers. Previous experiences with peers in the regular system adolescents with disabilities describe it as negative experiences that include mocking and provoking, and adolescents with disabilities had a small number of friends with whom they socialised. Being in the environment of other students with disabilities in the Centre, for some participants made it possible to feel good - when they came to the Centre, made friends and had a feeling of satisfaction upon arrival and even happy to move to a new school. One participant reported that she felt good being surrounded by other students with disabilities and not giving too much importance to the change that took place. Through the thematic analysis, results show that adolescents had positive and negative relationships with peers in regular school. From their statement, there is no evidence that adolescents had any unpleasant experiences with their peers during their stay at the Centre.

Regarding transferring to another school, the parents/guardians of the participants had different opinions based on certain factors. If the situation in the previous school was challenging, parents/guardians were generally satisfied with the transfer to another, new school, regardless of whether it was a special school - mothers are usually satisfied and fathers express more dissatisfaction and anger due to the decision to transfer to another school. According to statements from adolescents with disabilities, some parents had indifferent attitudes toward the child's transfer to a special school. In cases where the previous school or Social Welfare Centre decided about the transfer, parents weren't necessarily satisfied with such a decision. Such a decision is often related to the family situation and reflects the relationships among family members, which is why it was necessary to separate the adolescents with disabilities.

#### 7.1.2. The perspective of professionals about the first research question

Following *the perspective of professionals* who work with adolescents with disabilities in an institution, the results indicate that professionals in their statements conclude that students with disabilities come to the Centre because of problems in the mainstream educational system. It is often a matter of inclusion, involving issues such as differing expectations for students with disabilities, attitudes toward them in regular classrooms, and the lack of appropriate procedures that accommodate their abilities. As Armstrong and Galloway (1994) pointed out, some adults labelled the children to suit their interests. They

allowed the requirements of their structural role within the education process to govern their perceptions of the children (according to Davis and Watson, 2001:27). Students with disabilities often reported experience a constant feeling of failure, which frequently triggers various emotional reactions. It is possible due to fact that classes in regular schools often have too many students and Teachers have insufficient competences to work with students with disabilities (Dingle et al, 2004; Richards, Clough, 2004; Bouillet, Bukvić, 2015).

In addition, students with disabilities are placed in the Centre as a result of poor living conditions and to be educated according to a special educational curriculum. In their statements, professionals conclude that the regular education system provides various forms of support for a student with disabilities, but the family doesn't receive the necessary systematic support. It must be taken into account that family functioning is a significant factor in educational opportunities for students with disabilities in the regular system: *"... but I mean failure at school.....Failure at school is sometimes, apart from those who have objective difficulties, the result of the family's situation not being good."*(F6). Therefore, separating the child from the family is the way of solving the problem, not taking into account that separating the child from the microsystem and the importance of the role of the family as a necessary part of the child's development and the community (Watling Neal and Neal, 2013) can have significant consequences (Davies and Coe, 2019; Goldman et al, 2020: 608). Due to separation from family, relationships within the family change and emotional ties between family members are broken to a limited extent.

According to the statements of professionals, there is a visible absence of family support in the case of adolescents with disabilities educated in the Centre. Additional adolescents with disabilities feel separated from their families because they stay in the Centre for a whole week or longer, depending on the schedule agreed with the Centre for Social Welfare. Students miss their parents and family, which is one of the main statement of the adolescents with disabilities. The role of the institution for adolescents with disabilities is specific and an institution cannot replace a family (Goldman et al, 2020).

Professionals also conclude that the way of life and living conditions in the Centre is significantly different from living at home. Everyday life in the Centre is under defined conditions and daily schedules with strict structure of the day. Adolescents with disabilities are under the constant supervision of a teacher or educator. There is no real opportunity for adolescents to have time "for themselves" or to choose what they want to do, like at home.

Since the education is carried out according to a special curriculum, professionals did not comment on school success through the evaluation of adolescents with difficulties, but through the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Opportunities to learn skills and knowledge for everyday life as well as the possibility to use skills are limited to the conditions of the institution. It means that adolescents with disabilities acquire the skills of everyday life mainly required for life in the institution. Professionals stated that adolescents with disabilities often learn unnecessary data and information, while the learning of really necessary skills for everyday life is partially neglected: *"But when we arrived, in general, when we went to the city to shop, it was like that, everything as it is in the Centre, so they didn't know anything about how it works, everyone would go to the cash register, then everyone would go to the cabin, then they would take off their clothes in front cash registers. So that part is practical for them. I think that really, after that theoretical and some basics, it is really necessary to prepare as many of these real life situations as possible for them, so that they can start independently. Of course, not all of them can, but ... here some have been there for years, so we can't let them go...."* (F1).

Because of the above, professionals expressed doubts about being prepared for the transition, which will be discussed later on.

## **7.2. Discussion through the interpretation of the perspective of experience of adolescents with disabilities and perspectives of professionals who work with the adolescents with disabilities, about the second research question**

The following text provides an interpretation of the perspectives of experience of adolescent with disabilities and professionals about the second research question, which reads:

**How do students with disabilities in the period of transition from primary to secondary school see the decision-making process about their future lives?**

For the presentation of answers to the second research question first will be analysed the perspective of adolescents with disabilities, and how they see the decision-making process.

### 7.2.1. The perspective of adolescents with disabilities about the second research question

Following *the perspective of adolescents with disabilities* about the decision-making process, the results indicate clear insights into five themes highlighting the importance of the decision-making process for adolescents with disabilities: *Characteristics of transition to the Centre*; *Characteristics of life in the Centre*, *Choosing an occupation*, *Characteristics of the transition to secondary school*, *Characteristics of departure from the Centre*.

The theme *Characteristics of transition to the Centre* include the sub-themes *Persons and services involved in the transfer to the Centre*, *Emotional reactions on arrival at the Centre* and *Parents' reactions to the transition to the Centre* which create a perspective of the decision-making process of coming to the Centre. In most cases, adolescents with disabilities didn't know who decided on the special education system for them. The decision to come to the Centre is most often initiated by the regular school in case of inappropriate behaviour or learning disabilities, and social services as a form of protection in case of bad family conditions. They express anger over the social service decision to change schools. According to ADWD' view, parents/ guardians of the adolescents usually decide to transfer them to a special school, with the intention of protecting them and to have a better environment for learning (Decision of Appropriate Form of Education and Decision of the Form of Accommodation in the Institution of Social Welfare). One participant in his statements specifically declaratively accepts the decision made by his mother but it is evident from the content of his statements that he doesn't understand such a decision and why the decision is made. Because of that, some adolescents with disabilities have a hard time accepting the decision to come to the Centre.

The theme *Characteristics of life in the Centre* includes the sub-theme *Going home for the weekend from the Centre*. The most difficult fact of life in the institution for adolescents with disabilities is that there is no possibility of going home every day, for some adolescents with disabilities not even on weekends. Some adolescents *go home* according to the planned schedule according to the decision made by the Centre of Social Welfare or by the Court's decision. To change that decision and the schedule of going home a parent's signature is required.

The theme of *Choosing an occupation* includes the sub-theme *Possibilities of choosing a future occupation*. Some participants stated that the choice of their future occupation was

made at the suggestion of others because they didn't have other options. For few adolescents the choice of future occupation was made at the proposal of the Court, to go to a specific secondary school (another Centre for Education). Only three adolescents stated that has chosen a future occupation by themselves and that they participated in the decision of choosing a future occupation. Only two adolescents previously mentioned that they had been tested for secondary school (professional orientation process for students with disabilities). Adolescents with disabilities in the process of making a decision about their future occupation, had a "big meeting" about their secondary school education. The meeting was attended by their parents, social workers, and professional associates of the schools, and they asked the adolescents whether they would continue their education at a previously designated secondary school (depending on how they passed the vocational aptitude test).

The theme *Characteristics of the transition to secondary school* include the sub-theme *Parents' reactions to the transition to the Centre*. According to the adolescents' experiences and perceptions, their parents' reaction to the decision to transfer to a special school depended on the specific circumstances. Further to the above, it can be noted that parents of adolescents with difficulties react emotionally to all forms of transition and change. If there were particular challenges at the previous school, parents were generally satisfied with the transfer to a new school. In cases where the decision to transfer was made by the previous school or the Social Welfare Centre, the parents weren't necessarily satisfied with such a decision. Two adolescents stated that parents had indifferent attitudes towards their transfer to a special school as if nothing special had happened. Also, two adolescents stated that their father expressed more dissatisfaction and anger due to the decision to transfer to another school.

The theme *Characteristics of departure from the Centre* includes the sub-theme *New accommodation*. *Transition to secondary school for some SDWD is linked with a new accommodation*, about which they report different emotions. Also, there are feelings of dissatisfaction due to the decision on new accommodation because, in the case of one adolescent, the decision was made by his guardian.

The analysis of the statements of adolescents with disabilities indicate that adolescents aren't active participants in the decision-making process about their education and their lives. The decision is often made for them rather than with them, typically by those who guide and decide on their behalf — such as parents, guardians, and professionals (Makvić Salaj, 2020: 2). This can lead to negative consequences because individuals may feel a lack of control over their own lives and be unmotivated to follow through with decisions that don't reflect their

wishes and interests (for example drop out from secondary school). Involvement in the decision-making process is crucial for exploring and establishing personal identity, as it supports the development of essential skills for self-management and personal growth.

### 7.2.2. The perspective of professionals about the second research question

Following *the perspective of professionals* about the decision-making process, the results indicate that professionals conclude that when a family situation is unfavourable, the child should be placed in an institution. Such specific situations are recognised in the UN General Assembly Resolution which describes that “in specific cases it may be necessary to provide quality, temporary, specialised care in a small group setting” (Better Care Network, 2019), “for the shortest period and with the objective of child reintegration.” (Goldman et al., 2020: 608), bearing in mind the best interests of the child when making decisions.

Professionals believe that the need for institutional placement varies on an individual basis. They noted that Adolescents with disabilities may have more freedom when they are at home, but in accordance to their perspective, most do not use their free time effectively. In the long term, they tend to engage in passive activities, such as watching television, rather than spending time with their families. Because of these circumstances, professionals believe that institutional care offers better support for children and adolescents with disabilities. This can be seen from the statement (F5) about the family relationship and whether the student with disabilities has the support of his family. In a situation where a student didn’t have good achievement in regular school, but was reborn in the Centre. But it should not be at any cost and should not be a priority form of care for the child.

As authors Goldman et al (2020: 608) state, institutional care can have a role in a system for child welfare. “This care might be necessary in very few situations, such as those regarding the immediate safety of the child, unaccompanied children, or children with some highly specialised physical or psychiatric needs.”

### 7.3. Discussion through the interpretation of the perspective of professionals who work with the adolescents with disabilities, about the third research question

The following text provides an interpretation of the perspectives of professionals about the third research question, which reads:

**How do changes in public policies affect the lives of students with disabilities?**

For the presentation of answers to the third research question, it will be taken into account the perspective of the professionals who are working with adolescents with disabilities.

#### 7.3.1. The perspective of professionals about the third research question

Following *perspective of the professionals*, the result indicates that there is a lack of preparation for working with students with disabilities in the regular system. Problems of how to approach and work with students with disabilities cannot respond to the needs of ADWD (addressing needs) of students and their families, of students and their families, which is why some students with disabilities haven't been able to attend regular school at all, which is a consequence of educational policies that influence the child's classroom and school experiences (Davis and Watson, 2001).

When students with disabilities come to a special school, they have better school achievement, which indicates the failure of education in the regular system. For the regular education system to be more successful, it is essential to offer guidance on working with students with disabilities. It is in line with (F6) which points out that it would certainly be different if the conditions at school were different, if teachers were prepared, if assistants were provided and if there was family support. Professionals commented in their statements that although new forms of support for students with disabilities have been introduced, created opportunities for changes within the education system still need to be improved. Professionals (F6) believe that the aggravating factor for children with difficulties in regular schools are the criteria for obtaining teaching assistants. The criteria for getting a teaching assistant are getting



tougher and that's a huge obstacle for children who need an assistant to function well in the regular system. Because of all this, fewer children can get an assistant.

From the perspective of professionals who work with adolescents with disabilities, the role and usefulness of teaching assistants is unclear. They commented on the work methods and the knowledge of teaching assistants about the characteristics of students with disabilities. Professionals referred (F1) to the teaching assistants' working methods and knowledge about the characteristics of students with developmental disabilities, which are insufficient. Teaching assistants mainly don't know the specifics of children with disabilities, how to approach them, how to work with them. Often, the teaching assistant is afraid of that child, especially if it is a child with more severe disabilities. From further statements it can be seen that professionals are aware of the problem in the regular system, keeping a teaching assistant for an individual student with disabilities, due to challenging working conditions. Professionals suggested that it is necessary to provide better support and education for teaching assistants in regular schools.

There was no change in the school conditions, which are adapted to the child, but the child must continue to adapt to the program and conditions of the school (Igrić, 2015). The educational system is not prepared for changes that require a connection between legislation and practice. In line with statements (F4) although the legal prerequisites exist, the right conditions for students with disabilities have not yet been created in regular education. For example, if there are two students with disabilities in the class, there is usually only one assistant.

Students with disabilities and their families often lack adequate support. While various forms of support are provided to students with disabilities within the regular education system, the family do not receive the same level of support. Furthermore, and considering the previously discussed reasons for the arrival of students with disabilities in the institution due to the need for separation, the family remains a bond with which nothing is systematically done. Recognizing and prioritizing the role of the family is one of the key recommendations from UN General Assembly Resolution on the rights of the child recommendations (UNGA, 2019). Common goals are foreseen for the purpose of reforming the childcare system by keeping families together, strengthening families and building support services for families in communities (Goldman et al, 2020).

Regarding the arrival of students with disabilities to the institution, professionals stated that the separation from the family for students with disabilities is implemented as a system



measure in the best interest of the child: *“Well, yes, everything is actually upside down here. A child has difficulties in the family, then we remove him from the family instead of helping that family.” (F6).* To positively change the life perspective of adolescents with disabilities facing challenges and entering institutional care, it is necessary to strengthen the families by providing support and setting boundaries within the family. Without this support, returning the child to the family that didn’t receive support resets the entire process to the starting point: As professionals pointed out (F5) their job actually turns out to be useless because family remains as fundamentally unhealthy family and the child eventually returns to that same family and everything remains the same.

Changes in public policies should be visible in the area of creating better opportunities for adolescents with disabilities. When experts talk about changes in public policies that affect the lives of adolescents with disabilities, they refer to the need to acquire new skills and knowledge, and to give adolescents with disabilities the opportunity to make their own choices. Professional (M1) emphasized the importance of asking children with disabilities, with whom they work daily, how they would like something to be. In fact, it is about enabling the basic idea of inclusion in the education system that gives each individual the opportunity to make decisions about their own lives and take responsibility for these decisions (Eurydice, 2018). The policy system should recognize adolescents with disabilities as equal social factors directly involved in decision-making, whose ideas can lead to changes (Tomić, 2015).

#### 7.4. Discussion through the interpretation of the perspective of experience of adolescents with disabilities and perspectives of professionals who work with the adolescents with disabilities, about the fourth research question

The following text provides an interpretation of the perspectives of experience of adolescents with disabilities and professionals about the fourth research question, which reads:

**How well are students with disabilities prepared for the transition period from primary to secondary school within an institutional context?**

For the presentation of answers to the fourth research question first will be analysed the perspective of adolescents with disabilities, how well are prepared for the transition period from primary to secondary school.

##### 7.4.1. The perspective of adolescents with disabilities about the fourth research question

Following *perspective of the adolescent with disabilities*, the result indicates that the thematic analysis of interviews with adolescents with disabilities revealed clear insights into two themes that explain the readiness and preparedness of these adolescents for the transition from primary to secondary school within an institutional context: *Characteristics of the transition to secondary school* and *Choosing an occupation*.

The theme *Characteristics of the transition to secondary school* include the sub-themes *Emotional reactions to secondary school*, *Self-awareness*, *Expectations regarding secondary school*. All three sub-themes are very interconnected in the presentation how well are readiness and emotions that adolescents with difficulties have regarding the transition to secondary school. Through the subtheme *Emotional reaction to secondary school* adolescents with disabilities express their emotions and thoughts about going to vocational school. Most adolescents are looking forward to the new school, feeling joy and excitement about the change in life that will occur. Five adolescents expressed positive feelings because *secondary school is closer to home*. Some adolescents expressed feelings of fear, discomfort and

uncertainty about going to vocational school, asking questions: *"Someone will make fun of me, maybe there will be bad teachers, strict, maybe I will fail the class, I don't know..."* and questions like: *"The question is if I feel like studying?...."*. Two participants stated a feeling of dissatisfaction due to unchanging life perspective because after finishing secondary school they couldn't go to college and it's going to be difficult to find a job. Subtheme *Self-awareness* shows that adolescents with disabilities are aware that they are finishing primary school under the special curriculum and are not completely sure of their abilities, or what life and studies in secondary school will look like. Adolescents are uncertainty about the level of knowledge for admission to secondary school. They have different perspectives about secondary school and fear that they will not know something and that they will be asked too difficult questions. Adolescents with disabilities in their statements expressed strong feelings of uncertainty in their abilities but on the other hand, strongly decided to finish secondary school. One adolescent with disabilities clearly expresses displeasure about attending secondary school and, if asked, would likely give up on it. (A-a. *..well, if I had my way.., I would have given up....yes..." (from secondary school)...* "Yes. "...(*would give up*)...), but because of fear of his parents, he knows that has to go. Subtheme *Self-awareness* shows that adolescents with disabilities have undefined expectations regarding secondary school or again do not know what to expect in secondary school at all. One participant expressed that he expects *"The rules await me just like here..."* but at the same time, adolescents expect that they will master the material more easily with a special program. It's going to be easier to complete the obligations in secondary school because after school will go home (some of adolescents with disabilities) and parents will help them to do the homework.

Theme *Choosing an occupation* expresses the readiness of adolescents to transition to secondary school through situations and emotions related to the whole process of choosing a future profession. Theme includes the sub-themes *Possibilities of choosing a future occupation*, *Emotional reactions related to choosing a future occupation* and *Awareness about the future occupation*. Most adolescents with disabilities express emotional reactions depending on their satisfaction with their future occupation and would like the decision to be different. An adolescent who expresses displeasure about attending secondary school also doesn't want to go to school for a profession he didn't choose independently (*"Look, I don't have to go to (another Centre) at all! I don't even have to go to (secondary school)! They put me in (another Centre) and I won't even go to school...so what!"*). Seven adolescents expressed the desire to attend secondary school for supporting occupations which can be

interpreted (from this subtheme) as an indication that they feel ready to make the transition. Depending on the information they have about their future occupation, it can be concluded that not all of them have enough information. Eleven adolescents had partial knowledge of the scope of work of future occupations, meaning they were informed about it. Further, four adolescents' express awareness of lack of knowledge about future occupation and lack of skills for future occupation. The statements suggest that they are uncertain about what they will do in secondary school and whether they are prepared for the transition.

#### 7.4.2. The perspective of professionals about the fourth research question

Following *the perspective of professionals* on how well adolescents with disabilities are prepared for the transition period from primary to secondary school, the results indicate that professionals have generally concluded that adolescents with disabilities are well prepared for the transition to secondary school. Looking through their work with adolescents, they believe that they prepared them in terms of all these competencies as best as they could. Professionals believe that they did everything possible to ensure a safe transition to secondary school.

It is a fact that adolescents have a personal experience that depends on how they will experience "what they are told". However, they learn most through their experience and it would be strange if they didn't feel fear and uncertainty about the transition to secondary school. There are feelings related to a new life situation. They should be prepared for new relationships with teachers and different situations and how to create friendship relationships with peers in a new school. For all students, and especially for children with disabilities, a stimulating peer environment, acceptance and a sense of belonging play an extremely important role in academic success, emotional development and a positive self-image (Vranjican et al, 2019; Krampač-Grljušić, 2015).

Regardless of the preparation for the transition, professionals can never prepare adolescents with disabilities completely for everything that awaits them. Professionals stated that with the first generations of students going to secondary school, they didn't know what to expect and what to do with adolescents with disabilities as preparation for secondary school. When it comes to students with disabilities, it is important to think about the needs of the students when planning for transition and to consider the importance of adaptations and

accessibility in the education system and individualising access to the student with disabilities (Šenjug Užarević et al., 2023).

Professionals stated that in their work with adolescents with disabilities, they aimed to empower adolescents with disabilities in the areas of emotional and social skills. They tried to place these adolescents in new and unfamiliar situations to enhance learning through practical experiences.

As a process of preparation, it is important that adolescent with disabilities can manage in an environment, go somewhere on their own, and know what they need in some public institutions. Professionals believe that such preparation is for perhaps older students, not for elementary school students. Therefore, this is a question of transition planning as it is a highly individualised process and what might work for one student may not be appropriate for another (Kellems and Morningstar, 2010).

The learning process involved both discussion and practical experience. Adolescents with disabilities should be prepared for new relationships with teachers and different situations and how to create friendship relationships with peers in a new school.

As part of the preparation to transition to secondary school, adolescents with disabilities went to see secondary schools and other Centres for Education, where they will continue their education. Future secondary schools are thus partially known to adolescents with disabilities. Adolescent with disabilities are learning for their future lives but also learn lots of unnecessary information, leaving them lacking essential real-life skills. Practical knowledge of real-life situations is somewhat neglected, and they haven't acquired many concrete skills.

Due to the upcoming transition to secondary school, adolescents have developed a sense of freedom in an entirely new life situation. Along with this feeling of freedom and the notion that some rules might be bent, they have also gained a sense of responsibility and maturity. In a new situation for adolescents, when they attend secondary school from home, write homework and tasks independently and learn the material, it is necessary to develop a sense of responsibility.

Regardless of the preparation, there is a need for help in the adaptation period because of the specifics of a transition period. Taking into account the specific experiences of students' with disabilities, research on support in transition process states that students with disabilities can have long-term positive effects when support is systematic and involves teachers, peers, family members and community members (Kohler et al, 2017, Riches, 1996).

Professionals stated that a program is needed to better equip adolescents with disabilities with the necessary skills and prepare them for transition. For effective preparation and support, implementation should begin earlier, as it is somewhat late to start just before secondary school: *"But that one adaptation period in that transition period, I think it's wrong that we have to only then..."*(F2).

Through their statements, they supported the fundamental concept of transition planning. It is essential that transition planning form the foundation of education, incorporating strategies throughout the educational period rather than relying solely on short-term activities for adolescents with disabilities when they are in a transition phase (Kohler et al., 2017).

## 7.5. Discussion through the interpretation of the perspective of professionals who work with the adolescents with disabilities, about the fifth research question

The following text provides an interpretation of the perspectives of professionals about the fifth research question, which reads:

**How do changes in public policies affect the professional practice of the institutional staff members?**

### 7.5.1. The perspective of professionals about fifth research question

Following *the perspective of professionals* on how changes in public policies affect the professional practice of the institutional staff members, the results indicate that professionals express dissatisfaction with their work, citing the inertia of the system that fails to recognize real needs. They feel a sense of futility in their efforts, which often do not lead to meaningful change. Therefore, it is essential to improve the possibilities of various education programs, enhance opportunities for creativity and improve overall job satisfaction.

Professionals pointed out the great lack of coverage in the field of work with families of adolescents with disabilities, who are left to fend for themselves. Working with families of adolescents with disabilities would add value to the work done by professionals. As stated before, returning the child to the family that didn't receive support resets the entire process to the starting point.

It is necessary to empower adolescents with disabilities for future education, empower them to learn new skills and knowledge and to improving skills for future work.

It is important to increase opportunities for students with disabilities, because many have the abilities necessary for new knowledge and skills (passing the driving test). Professionals commented that it is valuable to listen to the thoughts of adolescents because anger and revolt is normal reaction when you take away a man's freedom and don't give him anything, you actually trample on him. Life in the institution is specific, the system is rigid and strictly defined, but sometimes an exception is made, and then released somewhere.

Adolescents with disabilities must have the opportunity to choose for themselves because we all have a choice (M1).

There have been significant changes in legislation concerning young people with disabilities. However, these changes are often implemented only "on paper."

The institution must change, and the change must be within the institution. Changing the internal system of the institution is necessary because by doing something, the same thing over and over again, students with disabilities will feel pressured. They begin to feel as if they have no freedom.

Support to adolescents with disabilities is only temporary, while they are in the institution. Transition planning needs to be long term activities because there is an absence of a system for monitoring students.

It is necessary to enable greater freedom of choice and respect for individuality and to provide educational programs with more career choices for students with disabilities.

Professionals have pointed out (F3) that it is necessary to create some kind of programs that will make the transition easier for students with disabilities, but I also think that they themselves have done enough.

It is necessary to change the perspective of possible future occupations for students with disabilities because of a limited range of occupations for students with disabilities and reduced opportunities to find a job. Adolescents with disabilities have limited options for choosing a future profession that is not aligned with the labour market. Babić and Leutar (2010) state that young people with disabilities are trained in a very limited number of three-year occupations that are quite unsuitable for the needs of the modern labour market (assistant cook-pastry chef, assistant tailor, assistant haberdasher, assistant shoemaker, assistant knitter, assistant carpenter, assistant auto bodyworker, assistant auto painter, assistant plumber, assistant gardener or florist, assistant graphic designer-box maker or bookbinder, and assistant painter). It is essential to emphasize the importance of professional practice during secondary education, as it plays a key role in preparing students for the labour market. Professional practice offers students the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real work environments, allowing them to develop practical skills, professional connections, and work habits, which facilitate their transition from school to the workforce. Additionally, internships can help students shape their career interests, boost their motivation to learn and enhance their employment prospects after graduation.



There is an evident lack of systematic monitoring and data management of students with developmental disabilities after high school. For a small number of students, it is known what happens to them after they leave the Centre.

## **7.6. Review the process of research and data processing (limitations of research)**

Since some limitations of the research were discussed in a previous chapter, the most significant limitations or weaknesses will be summarized below.

There are certain methodological limitations in the conducted research as well as shortcomings in its implementation.

From the standpoint that at the time of conducting the interviews all participants had already been in the institution for some time, it is important to take into account that their views on life experience of living in an institution depend on the subjective expression of current life situations. Some participants were already deeply experiencing the initial changes of the transition period and felt strong emotions about moving to secondary school and leaving the Centre for Education. As a result, they didn't answer some questions objectively, instead expressing the emotions they felt at that moment.

One of the specific limitations was the prior acquaintance of all participants (adolescents with disabilities and professionals) with the researcher, although in different relationships. During the interviews, situations arose where participants assumed the researcher already knew or understood the context or meaning of certain statements. Therefore, when interviewing adolescents with disabilities, it was necessary to ask additional follow-up questions for most items, to obtain more complete answers, rather than simple "yes" or "no" responses.

A similar situation occurred during the focus group interview, where professionals assumed the researcher was familiar with the described situations and initially provided very generalized answers, considering them 'common knowledge'. The impact to such knowledge has had to be taken into account when interpreting and presenting the data. Additional questions were necessary to obtain a complete answer.

Each individual observes and perceives the world through their own subjective concepts and meanings, that is, opinions and attitudes shaped by experience. It is precisely

these conceptual differences that cause differences in the external world, i.e. through our own subjective perception we attach different meanings to potentially the same systems and thus find external differences (Prepolec, 2020: 34).

The recommendation for future research is aimed at implementing the intense of the participants, that is, to carry out interviews to participants an unknown researcher in order to eliminate the possibility of generalization of facts or a subjective impression. Also, adolescent with disabilities wouldn't have the impression of authority, but the impression of equal value and reduced the possibility of impact on the openness of responding.

The recommendation would also include involving more diverse professionals in more focus groups of professionals who work directly with adolescents (such as nurses, caregivers, cooks, and school support staff) in the focus group, in order to gather a wide range of opinions and insights about the experiences of adolescents with disabilities.

The primary challenge and limitation of the research was writing a doctoral thesis in a foreign language. Since the research was conducted in a Croatian-speaking area, all the materials and results had to be translated into English. Because of that, one of the biggest challenges was translating the responses of adolescents with disabilities. Many adolescents spoke with distinct local accents and dialects and used specific expressions. Given the specificity of their phrasing and speech styles, it was difficult to translate statements into English without risking a loss of their original meaning. For this reason, some phrases include the interpreted meaning in Croatian in parentheses, or explanations are provided in footnotes. Furthermore, challenges included individual gestures or even sounds that the adolescents used in place of answers they did not want or could not provide. All of these factors required great dedication and attention during translation to ensure that the participants' statements retained their intended meaning.

Sharing and observing personal experiences characteristic of qualitative research puts the researcher and the participant in direct interaction and can affect research objectivity (the Guidelines for Conducting Qualitative Research with Children (2020:1).

As all participants knew the researcher personally, albeit in different roles, the impact such familiarity has on them must be taken into account when interpreting and presenting data. Practically speaking, the prior knowledge of both participants and researchers can positively contribute to creating a dialogue that is not one-sided (Vlatković, 2018: 7). Like dialogic listening, this approach emphasizes respect for diversity and fosters

relationships based on equality. In this way, dialogue becomes a psychotherapeutic exchange, where one gains insight into their own abilities through comparison with others and learns self-listening by listening to others (Tomić, 2012: 44). Establishing a relationship of trust is essential for obtaining honest and open responses. The group of adolescents with disabilities knew the researcher as their special teacher. The researcher was very aware of the influence her authority has on adolescents with disabilities and took steps to enable adolescents with disabilities to openly express their opinions and experiences. The researcher constantly maintained a neutral position by reminding the participants of anonymity and confidentiality of data and the possibility of withdrawing from the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable.

The professionals participating in the focus group knew the researcher as a colleague. As data was collected in a group setting, special emphasis was placed on the importance of confidentiality of the information placed forward in the interview. The question of honesty in their answers can be raised. However, the familiarity with the researcher might have led to greater trust and a feeling of security when giving honest answers to personal and difficult questions.

Additional limitations include that this research was conducted in a single social welfare institution and utilized a convenience sample of participants. Given the location, the majority of adolescents with disabilities involved live in the City of Zagreb or the northern part of the Republic of Croatia. Additionally, the professionals are located in the City of Zagreb or the surrounding suburbs. The focus of appropriate education in secondary schools is often linked to the area of residence, which typically directs adolescents with disabilities toward local opportunities. Future research should include other cities and communities in different environments.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This research provided insight into the experiences of adolescents with disabilities living in an institution, in the period of transition from primary to secondary school.

The research questions that guided the study focused on understanding how prepared adolescents with disabilities are for the transition from primary school in a special institution to secondary school outside of the institution, and whether they have the support of experts during this transition period.

The original scientific contribution of the research is the emphasis on recognizing adolescents with disabilities as research participants, rather than subjects being tested. Their voices need to be heard, allowing them to actively participate in the decision-making process. Another significant aspect of this scientific contribution is reflected in the conceptual thinking of organizing systematic support, in the challenging transition period. Using the Bioecological Model of Human Development and Kohler's Taxonomy as a theoretical framework to observe the transitional period, we can observe that the child with disabilities must be placed at the very centre of the process. Different systems from the ecological model hierarchy greatly influence the development of the individual, in accordance with the child's potential. Especially when it comes to a child with disabilities. An additional challenge for children with disabilities is the absence of the basic system, the family, which has been replaced by an institution. Life in the institution affects the development of self-image, and thus the experience of the environment and vice versa. From adolescents with disabilities perspective, the institution becomes a place where they belong and it is necessary for them to feel accepted and included in the wider social environment.

In line with previous research (van IJzendoorn et al., 2011; Dozier et al., 2012; Vávrová, 2015; Lago & Elvstrand, 2021; Gayeong et al., 2024.) indicate on important role of institution. If the institution or the environment does not accept children as a whole, they are deprived of an important segment of social acceptance and inclusion, and further traumatized and marginalized (Žižak, Koller-Trbović, 1999). This raises the question of whether earlier environments may have missed the opportunity to ensure acceptance of children based on their experiences, which may also be the starting point for some future research.

Finding of this qualitative study on the experience of adolescents indicated a difference in the experience of life and education in and outside the institution, and areas significant in their daily lives. The main and aggravating difference pointed out by adolescents with disabilities is the inability to go home every day from the Centre and the consequent separation from the family.

Previous life experience, before coming to the Centre, influenced the emotional reactions of adolescents with disabilities to the very situation of being in the institution. Adolescents with disabilities state that the established daily routine at the Centre often does not take into account their habits and needs. Therefore, some adolescents have difficulty accepting and respecting it. This is precisely why it was necessary to approach the interpretation of the experiences adolescents report about strict rules in institutions more carefully, considering their previous experiences, age, and attitude towards the rules. As a possibility for some future research, it would be important to investigate their perception of life, through a longitudinal study, after a longer period since leaving the Centre.

From the perspective of adolescents with disabilities the existence of rules and schedules within the institution that they have to follow, emerges as another challenging aspect of life in the institution. Such conditions and structures often limit the sense of autonomy and self-expression, leading adolescents with disabilities to feel they have minimal control over their daily lives. In addition, such circumstances make adolescents with disabilities additionally dissatisfied and often uninterested in learning or participating in other activities within the institution. In the institutional environment, the personal choices of adolescents with disabilities - such as those related to meal selection, social interactions, or leisure activities - are often ignored, creating an atmosphere that prioritizes uniformity over individuality.

This is a moral and ethical question that remains open, because adolescents with disabilities report positive experiences in functioning and social contacts, but with perceived limitations in communication with family members and the rigid structure of the day in the institution. It can be observed that children with disabilities possess the same human rights as all other children. In the situation of life and education in an institution, adolescents are deprived of their basic human rights, the right to live with their families. This right is often denied due to the wrong legal framework or its interpretation, according to which separation from the family is the solution to the existing difficulties of the child and the family.

The role of the family in the development of the child is specific, because, in terms of the bioecological model of development, it participates as a microsystem in which the initial development of the individual takes place, influences the development of all family members individually and the creation of their relationships (Rosa and Tudge, 2013).

However, when the parental environment does not provide the conditions and opportunities and does not provide real care for the child, disabilities limit child's development. The findings indicate the existence of various challenges in family functioning for almost all participants, to varying extents and intensity.

By respecting participants' subjective perspectives (adolescent with disabilities and professionals who are working with them), this research provides concrete recommendations for improving the quality of support for adolescents with disabilities during the transition from primary to secondary school, thus fulfilling its applied purpose.

This research also indicates that the problem does not exist only in the transition period from primary to secondary school. The needs of students with disabilities are not well recognized even in the regular education system. Because of this, there is a failure in regular education and children with disabilities come to an institution. To ensure the best possible conditions for inclusive education and the right to an education that develops their potential and prepares them for adult life, strong support must be provided to integrate children with disabilities into the regular education system. In order to prevent the above-mentioned problems, it is essential to ensure the realization of human rights for all children, the right to education for children with disabilities among others children, regardless of their differences, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). From the perspective of experts working with adolescents with developmental disabilities, the system provided support, but some aspects of such support were not clearly defined. The role of teaching assistants should be defined with clear outcomes and objectives when a new individual joins the classroom. Existing educational programs for this role should be equally validated and aligned in content, incorporating knowledge of various disabilities, student functioning, and practical examples of best practices for individual situations.

The research was guided by the idea that the concept of transition planning is the fundamental basis of education (Kohler et al, 2017), which directs the development of student educational programs to the student himself, allowing him to actively participate in the decision-making process important for his life. According to Dworkin (2000, cited in Žiljak, 2005:252), abilities represent the freedom a person must attain to create a life that is valued

through reason. Individuals have opportunities and should take responsibility for their choices. Based on this understanding, social support should foster such freedom and abilities. It is essential to remove constraints that limit choices and opportunities for meaningful action, respecting the human rights of children with disabilities and the right to preserve their own identity. From the perspective of professionals working with adolescents with disabilities, several areas of support were identified as lacking during the transition from primary to secondary school. By identifying these areas, this research creates new opportunities to improve the support system for adolescents with disabilities. In the educational system, the families of adolescents with disabilities must play a more important role. To fully participate in creating a support plan for the transition period, as a key part of the microsystem, families must receive the necessary support. Often in the system, this support is missing and parents are full of questions and ignorance about the rights and opportunities that a child with disabilities actually has.

This research highlights the fact that the entire transitional period should be carefully planned, and adolescents with developmental disabilities should play an active role throughout the process. This ensures they receive adequate support, are well-informed, and are properly prepared to understand what to expect in the future stages of their lives. By analysing two perspectives (the perspective of adolescents with disabilities and the perspective of professionals), we can conclude that there is a certain similarity between them. Through both perspectives, the awareness of the present feeling of dissatisfaction is passed. The impossibility of changing one's perspective of life in the institution and the possibilities of future life after completing education in a special institution for adolescents with disabilities is conditioned by limitations in the possibilities of providing support by professionals. The limitations are conditional on the specifics of the educational program and the very conditions of life in the institution. Such limitations within the education system for adolescents with disabilities must be changed in the direction of ensuring all conditions for adequate support and inclusion in the regular education system. Future research should be carried out in order to determine specific measures and work programs of professionals in the direction of planning a transition period for adolescents with disabilities.

In planning the transition process, children need to see themselves as one of the most important actors. This role is extremely important in all areas of life. The active participation of adolescents with disabilities in the decision-making process for their lives and needs is a

necessary step in enabling complete personal development, as well as ensuring the human rights that are necessary for full participation in society.



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**10. APPENDIX**

<b>Number</b>		
<b>Appendix 1</b>	Information form for participant parents/guardians	
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Consent for participation in the research	
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Consent for participation in the focus group	
<b>Appendix 4</b>	The first information letter for the participants in the focus group	
<b>Appendix 5</b>	The second letter for the participants in the focus group	
<b>Appendix 6</b>	Demographic data of the focus group participants	
<b>Appendix 7</b>	Scheme presentation of life experience from each period of the life of adolescents with disabilities	

## **Appendix 1.**

### **Information form for participant parents/guardians**

Dear parents/guardians,

Herbay, I want to introduce you to the information that the Centre for Education will conduct a scientific project "Transition period from primary to secondary school - the experience of adolescents with disabilities" to improve the quality of education of the students who are educated in the Centre for Education. In the project, we will deal with their past and future (secondary) education quality.

The eighth-grade students and teachers/educators will participate. The students will be interviewed at the end of this school year.

The topics that will be discussed with the students will be related to their life before coming to the Centre for Education, the elementary school they first went to, coming to the Centre - how they feel about life in the Centre, and what they think awaits them after finishing elementary school - their expectations for the next period of their lives when they leave Centre for Education.

Teachers/educators will also be interviewed and it will be discussed in a focus group about the advantages and disadvantages of the lives of students who graduate from the Centre for Education as a special primary school.

The purpose of this research is to obtain important data from the students themselves, and their view of life in the institution, which will enable changes in the educational plan and program in favour of better inclusion of students with disabilities in society and meeting their wishes and needs.

The students were informed about everything that was going to happen and accepted to participate. They understand what is required of them and know that they can withdraw from the project at any time. Participation in the project ensures complete anonymity of the students and the results will not be published publicly or used for other purposes.

Please confirm with your signature that you have read and understood the notice.

In Zagreb, \_\_\_\_\_20\_\_.

Signature of parent/guardian

## Appendix 2.

### Consent for participation in the research

#### CONSENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the naming project "The transitional period from primary to secondary school - the experience of adolescents with disabilities" as part of which an interview will be conducted, about my life and education.

These data are important to get new information about the life experience of students with disabilities and our education in the Centre for Education, to make it better and more comfortable for us students.

I understand what is required of me and they explained to me that I can withdraw from the project at any time. My parents/guardians were also informed about everything.

Signature:



### Appendix 3.

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUP

In the Centre for Education research is being conducted. The title of research is *“Transition period from primary to secondary school- life experience of students with disabilities”*.

The aim of this study is to understand the meaning that a group of young people - adolescences with disabilities in transition, from primary to secondary school, give to their lives in an institution and how they see their future in everyday life. The adolescents with disabilities were interviewed about topics that are connected with their life experience in our institution and their hopes and fears about future life. For better understanding of young people perception of their lives during their childhood and their experience of institutional living the intention is to enable active participation to all research participants.

By doing this this focus group we want to find out how You, professional staff who work with adolescents with disabilities in an institution, experience and evaluate changes that take place in the lives of adolescents. Whether the support that young people with disabilities need and get is sufficient in transition period from primary to secondary school and whether adolescents with disabilities are ready for those changes.

This kind of data collection will have significant role in defining new guidelines for educational policy planning, creating and development of an adequate system of support for adolescents with special needs in a period of transition from primary to secondary school, in order to achieve the desired changes to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the social environment.

**Focus group is completely anonymous; any private information will not go out. The focus group discussion will be recorded so that it can accurately represent people's views. Collected data** from the focus group will be generalized and interpreted through research questions with no personal details or an indication about the source of it. Name of the Centre for Education will also be pseudonym.

After reading and clarifying the research information, with my signature,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (first name and last name)

I confirm that understand the purpose and the way of conducting the research and agree to participate in the research. I also agree that the interview is being recorded and I can read it after being transcribed.

Signature:

---

#### **Appendix 4.**

The first information letter for the participants in the focus group

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to use this opportunity to invite You to participate in the focus group for the research that have been conducting in the Centre for Education.

The title of research is “*Transition period from primary to secondary school- life experience of students with disabilities*”. It involved 3 generations of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students with disabilities (19 in total). They were interviewed about topics that are connected with their life experience in institution and their hopes and fears about future life. Collected interviews were transcribed and analysed and some important themes came out from that data.

Derived themes are important in a role of presenting the life experience (good or bad) that young people/ adolescents with disabilities experience while being in a form of institutional life and going through transition from primary to secondary school.

Focus group is the final stage in the overall closure of mentioned research. It is an opportunity for us, professionals, to talk about our practice and to help young people with disabilities overcome and reduce doubts and discontent in sensitive period of life. That important data I would like to share with You.

This research is very important in our field of practice because such type of research had not been done. That's why Your participation is of great importance- to hear Your thoughts and suggestions in improving work practices, to shift standards and enable better life experience of adolescents with disabilities.

**Focus group is completely anonymous; any private information will not go out!**

Data from our focus group will be generalized and interpreted through research questions with no personal details or an indication about the source of it. Name of the Centre for Education will also be pseudonym.

Our meeting will be held at.....

With some refreshments, in a relaxing atmosphere, it would not last more than an hour.

Please contact me as soon as possible so that all could be organized.

Thanks You in advance for Your participation.

Sincerely,

## Appendix 5.

The second information letter for the participants in the focus group

Dear colleagues,

I inviting you to participate in the research focus group that I conducted in the Centre for Education.

Your participation in the focus group, where we will be able to jointly comment on the results of the conducted interviews with adolescents with disabilities, is of great importance.

Participation in this focus group is an opportunity for us professionals to **openly discuss problems in practice** in order to make it easier for future generations of adolescents with disabilities to overcome doubts and dissatisfaction in a sensitive period of life.

Your expertise would greatly add to the discussion and quality and round out this complex research.

**The focus group is completely anonymous; any private information will remain confidential. The work of the focus group will be audio recorded in order to convey the thoughts of the participants as accurately as possible.**

**Our focus group will be held on (to put date) at (time) , in the teachers room.**

There is also the possibility of an appointment **on (put date) at (time) , in the teachers room**, which depends on the number of participants.

*Duty and other work at the Centre during conducting the focus group will be organized differently.*

In a relaxing atmosphere, with coffee and cakes, the expected duration is about an hour.

If you are able to participate, please let me know as soon as possible ( by email or by phone : XY) so that I could make final arrangements for holding the focus group.

**If you have any questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me.**

I look forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your participation.

Best regards,

**Appendix 6.**

Demographic data of the focus group participants

## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF THE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Date:\_\_\_\_\_ Hour:\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

What are you professionals: (enter profession)	How long have you been working in the profession:  <input type="checkbox"/> 0 -5 _years <input type="checkbox"/> 5 -10 years <input type="checkbox"/> 10- 15 years <input type="checkbox"/> more than 15 years	How long you work with students with disabilities: <input type="checkbox"/> 1 -5 years <input type="checkbox"/> 6 -10 years <input type="checkbox"/> 11- 15 years <input type="checkbox"/> 16- 20 years <input type="checkbox"/> more than 20 years
Do you have additional education?  <input type="checkbox"/> YES  <input type="checkbox"/> NO	How old are you:  <input type="checkbox"/> 23- 30 <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 <input type="checkbox"/> 41- 50 <input type="checkbox"/> 51- 60 <input type="checkbox"/> over 60	Gender:  <input type="checkbox"/> Male  <input type="checkbox"/> Female

## **Appendix 7.**

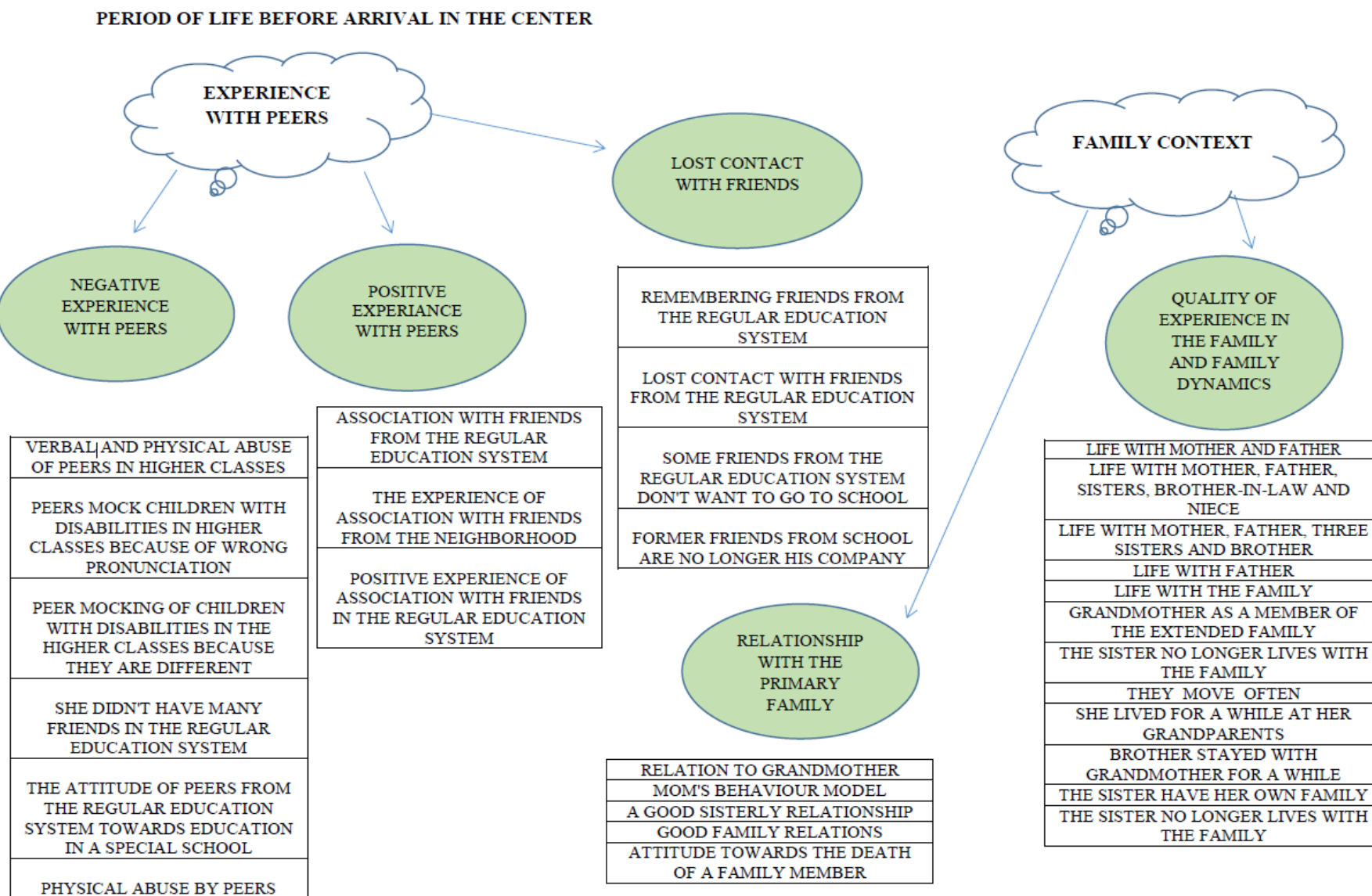
Scheme presentation of life experience from each period of the life of adolescents with disabilities

The Appendix 7. provides a graphic presentation of the key themes and sub-themes resulting from the analysis of interviews with adolescents with disabilities.

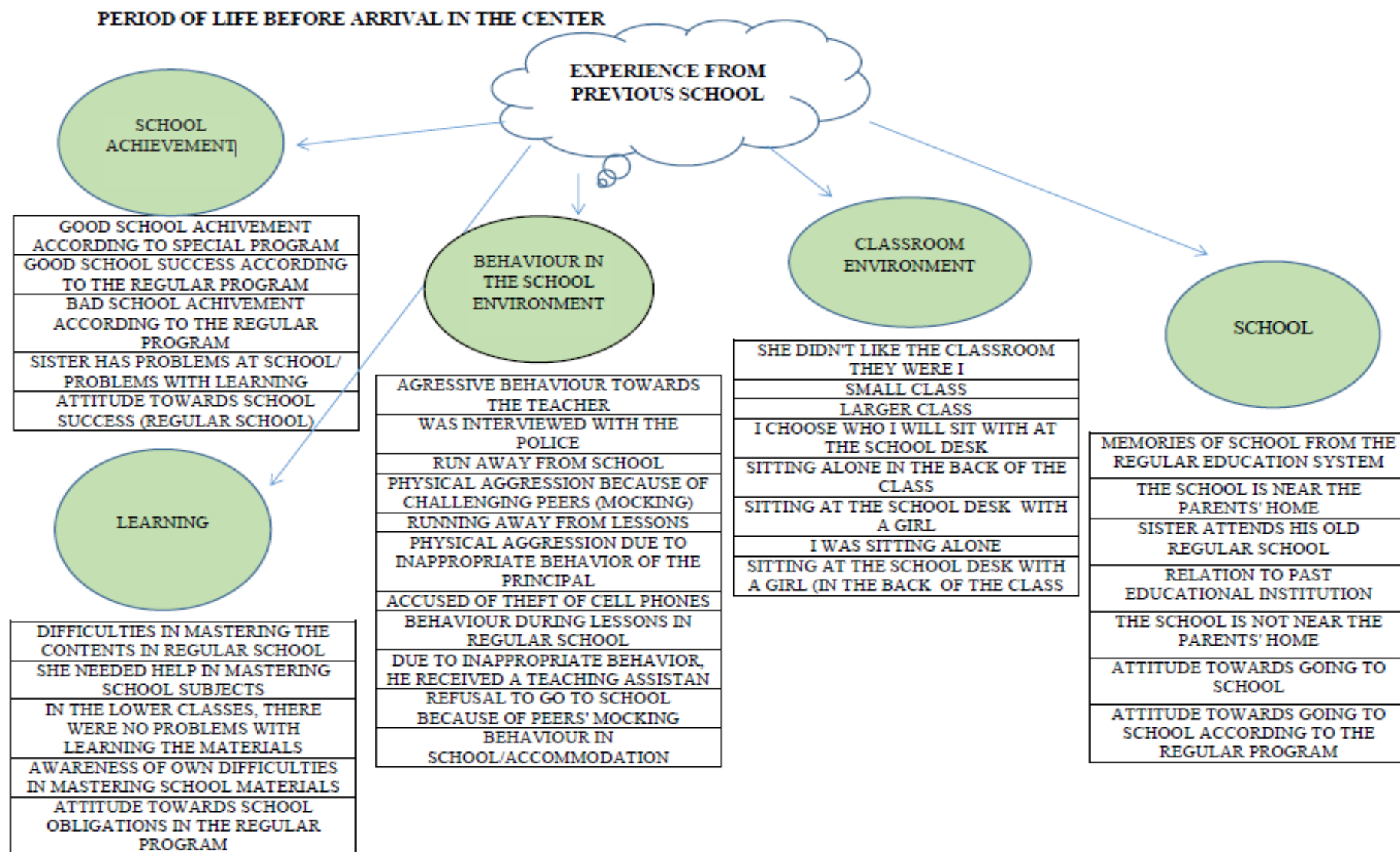
The following is a graphical presentation of life experience from each period of the life of adolescents with disabilities (the period before arrival in the Centre for Education, period of life in the Centre for Education and period of life after completing their education at the Centre for Education), which are described and presented through the statements of the research participants in Chapter 6 of this theses.



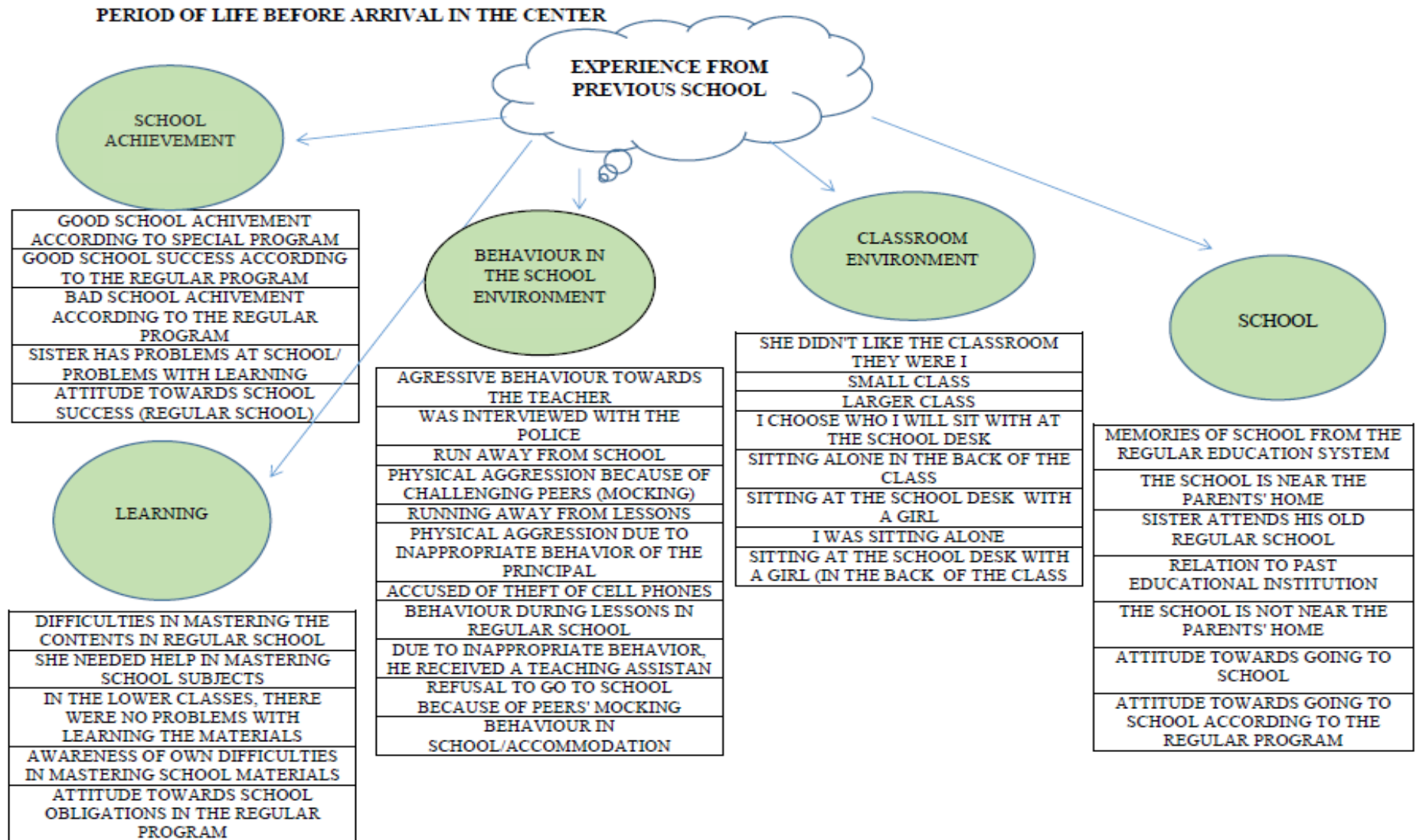
Appendix 7. Presentation of Themes and Sub-themes arising from the life experience of adolescents with disabilities (themes – white clouds, sub-themes– green circles, codes - columns)



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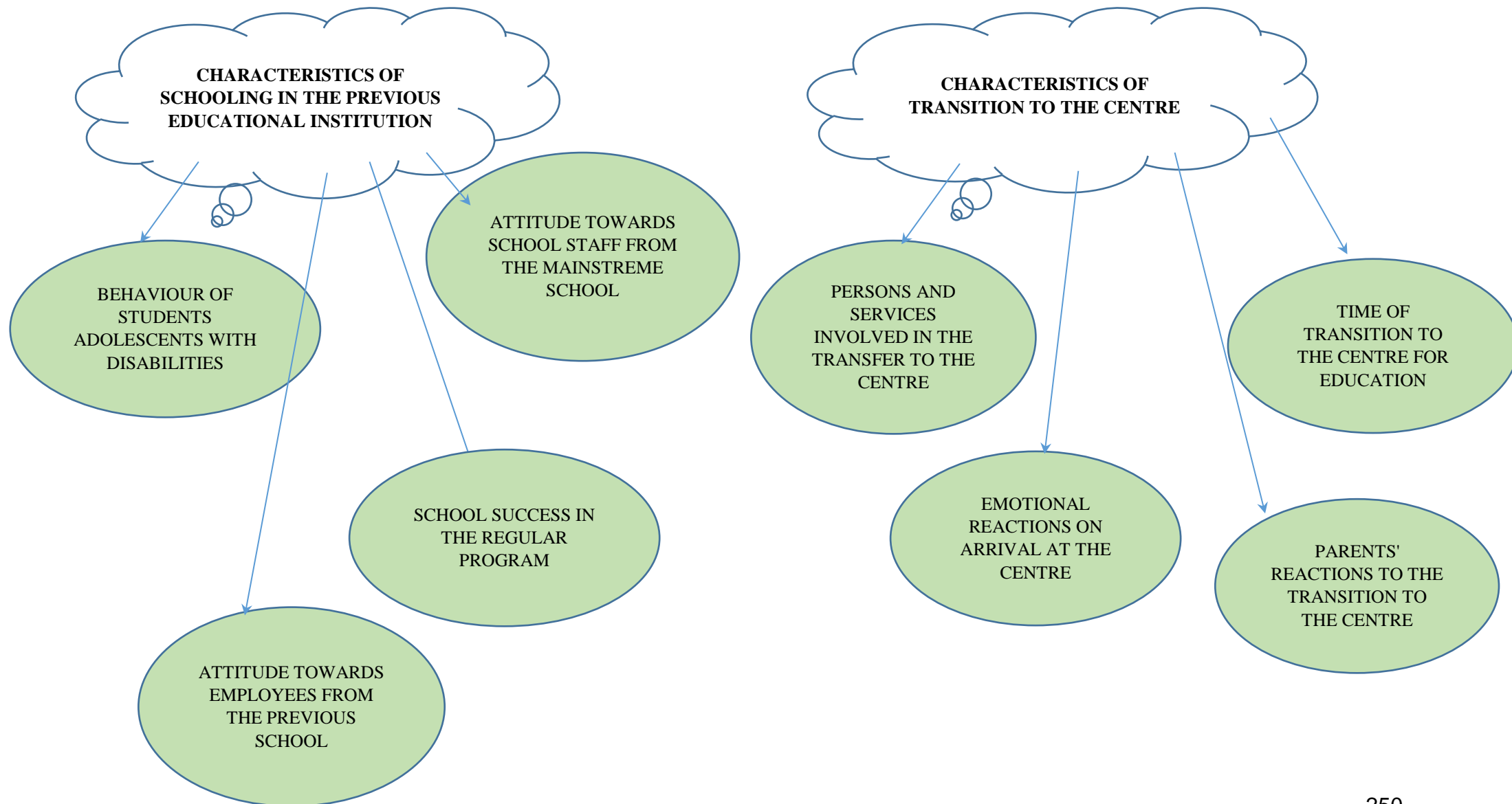


Appendix 7. Presentation of Themes and Sub-themes arising from the life experience of adolescents with disabilities (themes – white clouds, sub-themes– green circles, codes - columns)

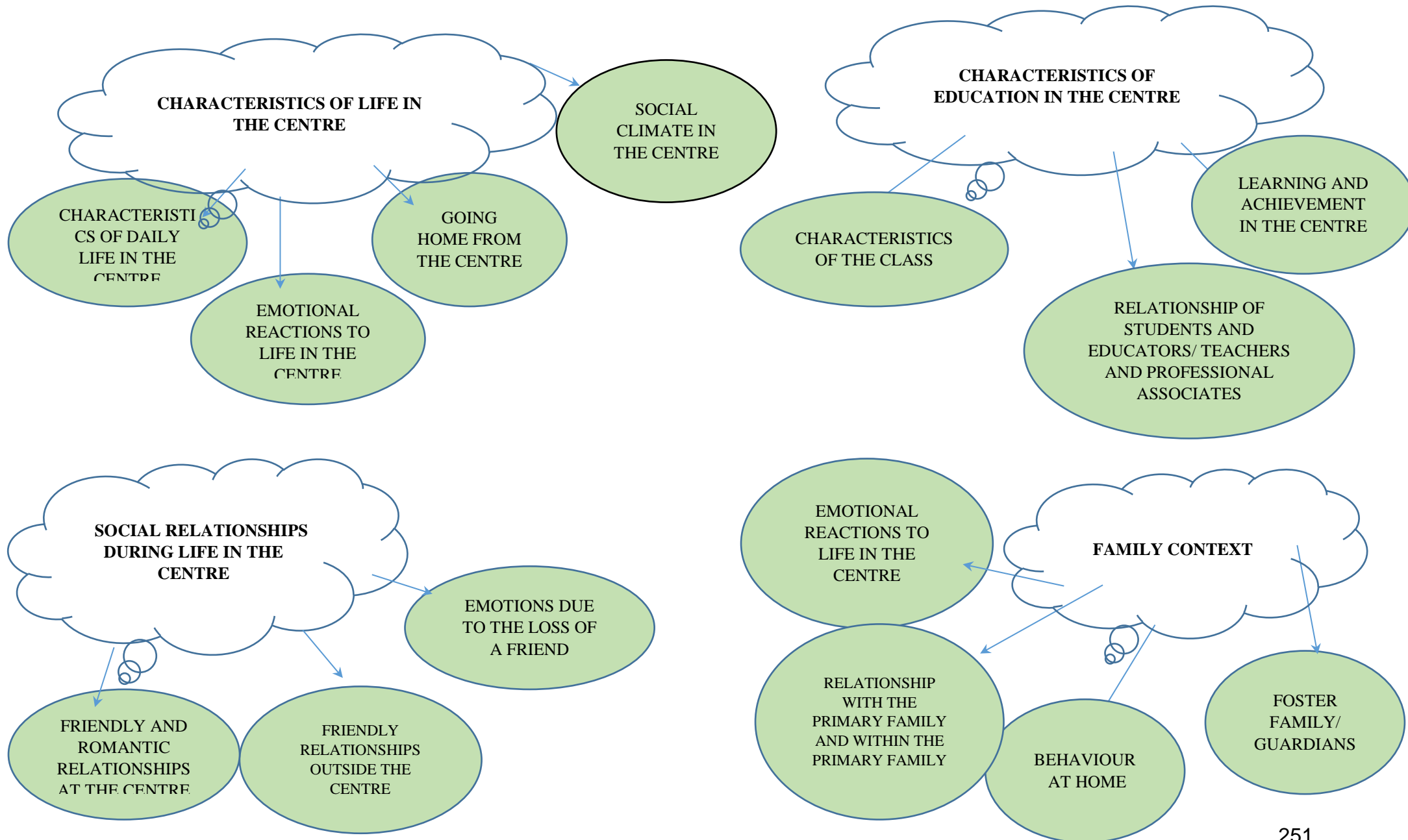


Appendix 7. Presentation of Themes and Sub-themes arising from the life experience of adolescents with disabilities (themes – white clouds, sub-themes– green circles, codes - columns)

**PERIOD OF LIFE IN THE CENTRE FOR EDUCATION**



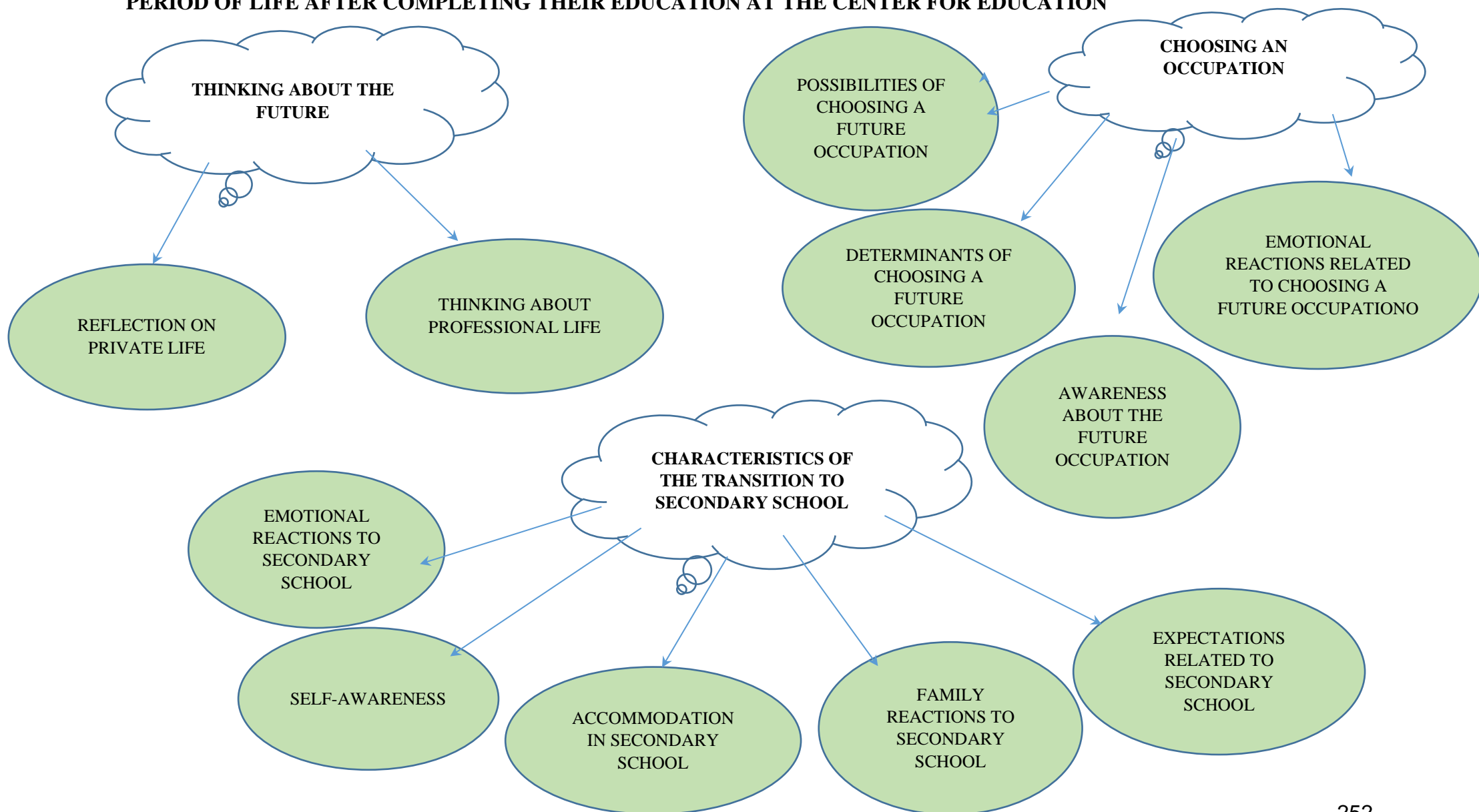
## PERIOD OF LIFE IN THE CENTRE FOR EDUCATION



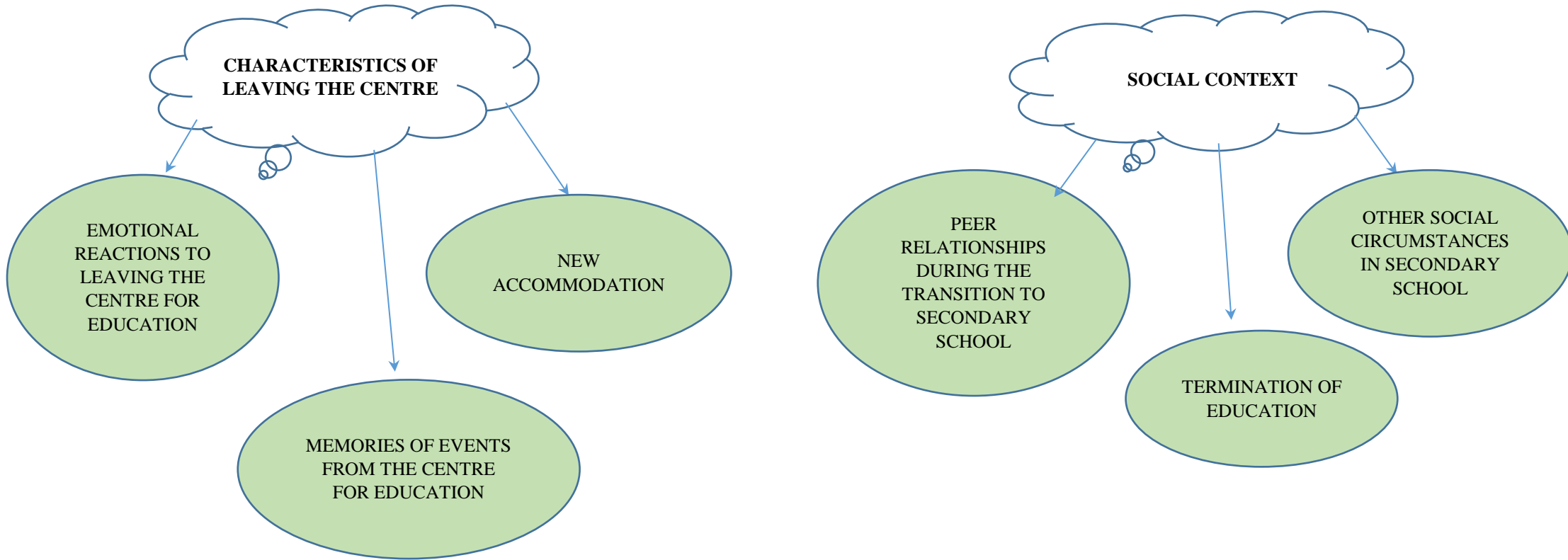


Appendix 7. Presentation of Themes and Sub-themes arising from the life experience of adolescents with disabilities (themes – white clouds, sub-themes – green circles, codes - columns)

**PERIOD OF LIFE AFTER COMPLETING THEIR EDUCATION AT THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION**



**PERIOD OF LIFE AFTER COMPLETING THEIR EDUCATION AT THE CENTRE FOR EDUCATIO**



**Neobranjena verzija = Pre-defense version**